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AUTHOR Morrow, Linda E.; Martin, Kaye M.; Glascock, Catherine H.
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ABSTRACT

This book is part of a series of case studies that demonstrate better ways to educate Ohio's students. The case study is part of the Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project, designed to support significant school-reform efforts among Ohio's elementary, middle, and high schools. This report describes the implementation of an innovative program at a middle school in eastern Ohio. The case-study team consisted of three school staff members and three college professors; data sources consisted of interviews, focus groups, teacher journals, surveys, and classroom observations. The text presents the history of the school and its situation in the community. It focuses on collaborative efforts, emphasizing the conversations taking place among teachers, students, the principal, and the community and describes the efforts to build collaborative structures within and outside the school. It also looks at the principal's role in developing collaboration and change. The book examines the role of inquiry at the school, especially as it relates to venture-capital assessment and professional development, and promotes the need to reflect on processes during periods of change. The report explores the reaction to innovation and the forces that have institutionalized the change process. The last chapter reflects on the changes and the future. The appendix describes the project methodology. (Contains 15 references.) (RJM)

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An Evolutionary Journey

The Case Study of East Muskingum Middle School

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OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Susan Tave Zelman, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

Nancy Eberhart, Ph.D.
Interim Chief Program Officer

Professional Development and Licensure
Marilyn Troyer, Ph.D.
Interim Director

Linda Nusbaum, Ph.D.
Research Project Manager

Document Management Services
Sue Fiedler
Typesetter
Lynn Brown-Van Sickle
Graphic Artist

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Dennis Thiessen, Ph.D.
Stephen Anderson, Ph.D.
Co-Directors of Transforming Learning Communities Project

Assisted by
Shawn Moore, Research Officer
Anastasia Meletopoulos, Research Assistant

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

AN EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY:

THE CASE STUDY OF EAST MUSKINGUM MIDDLE SCHOOL

Prepared by:

Linda E. Morrow, Ph.D., Muskingum College
Kaye M. Martin, Ph.D., Muskingum College
Catherine H. Glascock, Ph.D., Ohio University

In Cooperation with
Douglas Winner, Principal, East Muskingum Middle School
Patricia Bennett, Librarian, East Muskingum Middle School
John Smith, Teacher, East Muskingum Middle School

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Ohio Department of Education
Columbus, Ohio
1999

Dear Readers:

The 12 Transforming Learning Communities case studies enlighten readers about the search for better ways to educate Ohio's young people. The stories, told by educators themselves, paint a realistic picture of schools in Ohio.

The unique and inspirational perspectives of the school people highlight the triumphs of team spirit, the drive to turn obstacles into opportunities, and the effort to consider complex questions and find answers that lead to higher student achievement. These researchers tell stories of success and frustration in the endeavor to make life better for future generations.

At the core of educational change is a long-term commitment to teaching and learning that has the potential for creating positive change throughout society. The case studies emphasize intense, high-quality professional development; increased service to others; a holistic approach to education; the promotion of a sense of community; and a deepened understanding of the daily work in the classrooms, corridors, and boardrooms of public schools.

The educators at the heart of change encourage us to examine and refresh our views about schools. Sincere thanks is extended to the educators, researchers, students, and concerned citizens for their willingness to examine the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of change.

Sincerely,

Linda C. Nusbaum

Linda C. Nusbaum
Research Project Manager

Transforming Learning Communities Project

INTRODUCTION

The Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project was an initiative funded by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to support significant school reform efforts among Ohio's elementary, middle, and high schools. Education researchers associated with the International Centre for Educational Change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto were contracted to undertake in-depth case studies of school improvement in a select number of schools supported by Ohio's Venture Capital grants. The aim was to understand the school improvement efforts in these schools, and to engage other Ohio educators in the lessons learned from these schools' experiences.

The project title communicates the orientation to the study. "Learning communities" is a metaphor for schools as learning places for everyone (especially students and teachers) who has a stake in the success of schools as educational environments. "Transforming" signifies that the schools are in a process of change, and that the changes they are striving to achieve involve fundamental reforms in teaching and learning, assessment, organization, professional development, and/or governance. Transforming also captures the intent of the project to support — not just to document — the process of change in participating schools.

The TLC Project began in the Spring of 1997. A three-stage process was used to identify and select schools that had demonstrated notable progress in their efforts to implement significant change over the preceding three to five years: (1) solicitation of nominations from ODE staff familiar with the Venture Capital schools, corroborating opinions from independent sources (e.g., Regional Professional Development Center staff), and statistical profiles for nominated schools (e.g., performance and demographic data); (2) telephone interviews with the principal of each nominated school; and (3) ranking of schools according to relevant sampling criteria. Twelve schools were chosen for variation in type (elementary, middle, secondary); location (rural, urban, and suburban from various regions in Ohio); focus for change (e.g., teaching and learning, professional growth, school-community partnerships); school improvement model; and evidence of progress.

The individual case studies were carried out during the 1997/98 school year by teams consisting of at least two members of the school staff and researchers from four Ohio universities and one college that partnered with the schools. Each team designed and implemented a multi-method study of school improvement activities and outcomes in their school learning community. These included interviews, observations, surveys, and documents. While each case study reflected the unique character of school change at each school, the studies employed a common conceptual framework to guide their exploration and analysis of change in these school learning communities. The TLC framework oriented the case study teams to investigate change and change processes in multiple contexts — the classroom, the corridors, and the community — and in relation to three key processes of learning in organizations: collaboration, inquiry, and integration.

The major products of the Transforming Learning Communities Project include 12 individual case study monographs, a cross-case study and handbook, and a companion video at www.ode.ohio.gov.

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Chapter One

The Context of Change

This case study describes an ongoing, evolving process of change at East Muskingum Middle School. Situated on a hill overlooking the village of New Concord, Ohio, the school is a vital, integrated part of the community it serves. Teachers, parents, and students all agree that this school is a positive environment for learning and a good place for kids to be. Proficiency scores are high and violence is low. It is a successful school which is continuously striving to become better.

A middle school for more than 20 years, East Muskingum Middle School (EMMS) takes pride in its early implementation of many innovations associated with middle school reform. There is a long history of use of recommended middle school practices such as teaming, interdisciplinary units, intramural sports, and flexible block scheduling. An example of a positively evolving middle school, EMMS has moved beyond an initial period of dramatic, transformational change to a more gradual stage of change in which existing structures and practices are reevaluated and new goals are established.

In contrast to schools in crisis, EMMS is not responding to urgent calls for radical change to address serious and obvious problems. Instead, the impetus for change is the desire to be able to adjust to gradually changing needs and demands, and to do so with very limited resources. At this stage in the history of the school, some of the early innovations are being reexamined, revised, or refined in the light of experience. In addition, new needs and challenges are posed by the changed context of today's schools. It is important to note that the change process did not begin and end with the period of the case study. The need for change continues. Therefore, this case deals not only with the nature of recent changes but with the change process itself and how this process affects the people involved in the school and the larger community.

Multiple Perspectives

The case-study team consisted of three EMMS staff members, two college professors with four or more years experience with EMMS, and a university professor who was new to the school. The varying degrees of their involvement and familiarity with the school mean that each of them can provide a different perspective of the changes that have taken place.

Doug Winner is the current principal. He is a member of the community and attended school in the district. Pat Bennett is the school librarian and former fifth-grade teacher; she has been at EMMS for over 20 years. John Smith is a seventh-grade teacher and has taught in the district for 28 years. Linda Morrow is an assistant professor of education at Muskingum College, which is a part of the EMMS community. Linda is also a former high school teacher in the district and a long-time member of the community whose children attended EMMS. Kaye Martin is also an assistant professor of education at Muskingum College; her association with EMMS began in 1994 during the second year of implementation of Ohio's Venture Capital Grant. Catherine Glascock, an assistant professor of educational administration at Ohio University, became acquainted with EMMS at the beginning of the case study.

The majority of data comprising this study was collected during the 1997-98 school year as a part of the Transforming Learning Communities project. However, the study also includes data collected as part of the local Venture Capital Grant evaluation process (1994-98), as well as the perspectives of the case-study team members who participated in grant implementation. Data sources include individual interviews; focus groups; teacher journals; faculty, student, and parent surveys; and classroom observations. Together, these descriptions of experiences, observations, and recollections combine to form a complex picture of an evolving school community.

The School and the Community

The East Muskingum Local School District is a small rural district that serves about 2,300 students. It is a homogeneous community: only 1.22% of its students represent racial or ethnic minorities. The district covers 192 square miles of rolling hills about 70 miles east of Columbus, Ohio. It includes several small villages, a number of large farms, housing developments, mobile homes, Muskingum College, small businesses, and virtually no industry.

The district has a long history of examining its practices and making mid-course adjustments based on the results of such examination. The current district mission statement drafted in 1993 captures the way in which the district as a whole views its role in the development of students and the need for ongoing change across the district.

> *It is the vision of East Muskingum Schools to create for tomorrow's students an educational legacy of continuous improvement which is reflective of the successes of the past, the practices of the present, and the promises of the future.* (East Muskingum Local School District, 1993)

Ohio is now emphasizing the need for districts across the state to be involved in continuous-improvement planning and implementation. Continuous improvement, however, has been the focus in East Muskingum Schools for many, many years. In fact, the use of the term in the vision statement preceded the statewide emphasis by three to four years.

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When we brought former students, administrators, and teachers together with current constituents in 1993 to brainstorm what should be included in a districtwide vision statement, it became quite apparent that continuous improvement in the district was one of the primary things valued by all stakeholders. Change in East Muskingum Schools was not about jumping on every bandwagon that came along, but rather blending what had worked in the past with what had to be accomplished, and then moving ahead. They believed in blending the best of the past and the present to plan for the future. – Dr. Barbara Hansen, District Superintendent

The East Muskingum Local School District has consistently provided a climate for all of its buildings to engage in the change process. EMMS is no exception.

The middle school is very much a part of the community it serves. The nature of this community has a great deal to do with the ways in which educational change occurs here. Scotch-Irish immigrants founded New Concord in the early 1800s. Although the community is situated just on the edge of Appalachia and has many of the characteristics of that region, it is also different in several ways from surrounding communities. The early Presbyterian settlers brought with them a reverence for education — thus the founding of Muskingum College soon after their arrival. Respect and support for learning continue throughout East Muskingum, as evidenced by the community's financial support for the public schools. In the spring of 1993, voters passed permanent improvement and operating levies the first time they were placed on the ballot. This is very significant when one considers that the average income for families in the district is $28,882.

The EMMS school staff is representative of the larger community. In fact, many are alumni of the district. They share many of the values, beliefs, and concerns of other district residents. They are as likely to talk with parents at the grocery store, an auto shop, or a Little League game as they are to discuss issues more formally at a meeting or conference. According to EMMS staff members, the community's view towards educational improvement, as expressed by various advisory groups, includes "the desire to personalize management of instruction, maximize student potential, increase learning, expand instruction through technology, and strengthen staff development."

East Muskingum Middle School, located in the village of New Concord, includes grades five through eight and is one of five schools in the district. The staff of over 40 teachers and administrators includes six academic teachers per grade level, four special education teachers and one special education class aide, one full-time guidance counselor, one full-time assistant principal, a librarian, a gifted pull-out program teacher, and unified arts team teachers for music, health, computer technology, life skills, art, and physical education.

The building, which opened in 1975, was originally designed for 531 students; it now houses nearly 800. The school's physical structure was unique for this area at the time it was built: It utilized the open-classroom concept with few interior walls, and it was air-conditioned and carpeted, features which were considered quite luxurious at that time. Since that time, space has been reorganized and reallocated several times, resulting in the addition of walls and the creation of additional rooms.

The student body at EMMS is a homogeneous group in many ways. In terms of ethnic, racial, and cultural influences, there is a distinct lack of diversity. In general, EMMS students can be described as a reflection of the rural small-town environment in which they live. They are less worldly and streetwise than students in urban and suburban schools. In general, their courteous behavior and respect for adults illustrate small-town values. Discipline and referral rates for drug/alcohol use are very low (none in 1997-98), and only about five percent of the students are referred for tobacco use. About 80% of the students still live in homes where both parents are present. They appear well-adjusted and, for the most part, positive and enthusiastic about their school experiences.

A large number of students have been a part of the school district since birth. There is not a high number of transient or migrant families, and the district does not have large areas or pockets of low-income housing. Perhaps owing in part to the influence of Muskingum College, there is an expectation among EMMS students and families that students will go on from high school to higher education. There is a definite emphasis on education and school achievement.

Students at EMMS represent a wide range of socioeconomic levels, from very poor to very affluent. About 20% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches, a low number in comparison with other schools in the region. Students living in the more rural areas of the district reflect the district's proximity to Appalachia. In general, students appear to reflect a middle-class lifestyle, even when the average family income would indicate that such a lifestyle would be difficult to achieve. For example, as is characteristically found among teens, there is a very real focus on wearing the latest style of clothes with designer labels, even among the students for whom this creates financial hardship in their families.

Historical Perspective

From the day it opened, East Muskingum Middle School has been involved in constant, ongoing change which is more likely to be imperceptible than cataclysmic. However, the initial changes were important ones. When the middle school opened, all students who had previously attended one of the district's elementary schools through sixth grade before coming into New Concord for seventh and eighth grade were brought together in one school housing grades six to eight. Even at the time the school opened, some people were expressing an awareness and interest in the middle school concept. In 1979, the first small group of teachers attended the Ohio Middle School Conference, and the following year, EMMS hosted this annual event.

In 1982, when Dr. James Mahoney became principal, the movement toward a middle school became more apparent. Dr. Mahoney was a forceful and dynamic change agent who believed strongly in the middle school philosophy. In summarizing the changes that took place while he was principal, staff explained that children became the focus of everything and, for the first time, teachers' voices became a part of a democratic decision-making process. There was a move away from ability grouping and toward more

heterogeneous grouping and more flexible scheduling. There was also an effort toward community building. As part of this effort, Dr. Mahoney organized a week-long interdisciplinary unit which culminated in Pioneer Day, a Saturday festival for the entire local community. This became an eagerly awaited annual event which continued for 10 years.

Another period of significant change began in 1986 under the leadership of Principal Jack Hazard. During this time, many significant curriculum modifications were introduced, including unit/theme-based instruction, non-textbook science, and literature-based language arts. Variable use of time was also a focus, and the school began experimenting with longer blocks of time for instruction. This led to blocking, double blocking, and common team planning times. An intervention period was added to the schedule, and class sizes were a constant issue for discussions.

EMMS has received many grants and awards since the school opened. Two of the earliest building-wide awards were the National Education Excellence Award in 1983-84 and the Effective Schools Grant Award in 1990. Also received in 1990 was a technology grant, shared with the other middle and high schools in Muskingum County, that provided for the automation of the libraries and facilitated the purchase of computers and the development of computer laboratories. The eighth-grade science program was recognized throughout the state in 1989 through an energy project known as Project NEED. Science instruction continued to change throughout the early 1990s with teachers' intensive involvement in Project Discovery, while several Martha Holden Jennings Foundation Grants funded changes in language arts instruction. EMMS, as well as the four other buildings in the district, received their first year of Venture Capital funds in 1993, and the district was named one of the "two most inviting schools in the country" during the 1996-97 school year.

Venture Capital at EMMS

All the innovative changes that had taken place at EMMS prior to the awarding of Venture Capital monies had been made in the context of the very limited funds the community was able to provide. The Venture Capital Grant provided an unusual opportunity to increase the resources that were available to continue to improve the school. Linda Morrow, who assisted EMMS in their Venture Capital Grant application, explains how the initiative began.

Linda's Story

On an icy day in late winter of 1994, the year of 1998 seemed even more remote than the chance that East Muskingum Middle School might be awarded a Venture Capital Grant. On our way to the Venture Capital interview that would determine whether we would receive an award or not, we talked about the grant application, the school, what interview questions we might be asked, et cetera. The possibility of receiving $125,000 over a five-year period to improve teaching and learning seemed almost unreal to us, living and teaching in a district with much student success but very limited funds. We were excited and nervous with emotions that were intensified by treacherous road conditions on the drive from New Concord to Chillicothe. Little did we realize that those emotions would continue during the five-year drive through Venture Capital, a drive in road conditions that included changing road maps, signs, and some not-always pleasant discussions regarding whether or not we were actually headed in the right direction, let alone making progress toward our destination.

We had prepared for the interview in different ways, with one teacher going back through the grant application, highlighting all the key points and then studying them, trying to commit them to memory. We had chosen Classroom of the Future as our building model. The model was one of the reasons I was attending the interview. During the previous two years, as a faculty member in Muskingum College's teacher education program, I had worked under the direction of the project director, Mrs. Shirley Smith, with approximately 100 teachers in our student-teaching placement area (mostly in Guernsey and Muskingum Counties) on the Classroom of the Future Teacher Education Model funded by the Ohio Department of Education. One of the teachers on the EMMS grant-writing team had been a part of that project and had quickly seen that the mission of that model was consistent with the mission of EMMS.

But on that icy drive to Chillicothe, we talked about more than the grant application: We talked about what was really happening at the school. We discussed issues such as double-blocking — was it working or not — the schoolwide interdisciplinary Olympics unit, and the reading and writing workshop approaches used in the fifth and sixth grades. We discussed how far some teachers at the middle school had come already with respect to implementing middle school practices. Would this grant give us an opportunity to continue to build on our strengths, to learn what other effective middle schools were doing, to incorporate their best practice into our own, and to implement the Classroom of the Future recommendations? The interview team knew EMMS was a good school in a good district that had good kids and generally good parental and community support. But how exciting to have an opportunity to become even better!

How did I know EMMS was and considered itself to be good? I was a graduate of the district 23 years prior, a former teacher of students with specific learning disabilities at the district's high school who had worked closely with the EMMS special education staff, a friend of many of the teachers in

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the building, the parent of two sons who had both had positive experiences at EMMS, a former member of the first EMMS academic boosters group, and now the college supervisor of student teachers in the EMMS specific learning disabilities classrooms. I believed I knew the building, many of its teachers, and its relationship with other buildings in the district fairly well. I was honored to have been asked to consult with the grant-writing team in the development of the grant and to accompany others to the interview session. We all had positive stories to tell about EMMS, a sound school reform model, and a solid five-year plan. If only we could capture the essence of EMMS so that our interviewers could see we had already made a significant start on school improvement and that the time, funds, and opportunities that the Venture Capital initiative would provide for us would help us continue enthusiastically on our journey.

The remote possibility became a reality. EMMS was funded following a favorable interview on that cold winter day. In fact, during the first round of funding, three of the five buildings in East Muskingum Local Schools received Venture Capital awards. The remaining two buildings were awarded Venture Capital Grants during the second review period and actually received first- and second-year monies during their first year, thereby placing all five buildings on the same grant time schedule.

Classroom of the Future Model

The Classroom of the Future Model was selected as the Venture Capital framework for school improvement, because it was consistent with the direction for improvement already established at EMMS. The mission of this model was "to develop an educational system that prepares students to live and work in the 21st century and help students develop a commitment and capacity for lifelong learning" (Ohio Department of Education, 1990). The seven Classroom of the Future recommendations also seemed to be consistent with what was thought to be what the majority of EMMS teachers wanted to accomplish.

Classroom of the Future Recommendations

1. Enabling teaching teams to create a learning environment.
2. Offering formal and informal staff development.
3. Meeting students' unique needs through individualized instruction and moving students forward as concepts are mastered.
4. Focusing curriculum on integrated communications, knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for living and constructive citizenship; selling the connection between the school curriculum and issues facing society; and preparing students for work and lifelong learning.

5. Establishing learning as the constant and time as the variable.
6. Promoting learning through technology.
7. Looking at continuous progress through intelligent planning, and involving community members in the planning effort.

An advantage of this model also seemed to be that it was broadly stated and would give direction for change without focusing too narrowly to allow for individual and team goal setting.

The broad focus of the framework for improvement meant that change efforts could occur in many areas. This model could provide opportunities for teams and individual teachers to focus on different agendas for change according to their own assessments of need based on their professional experiences in the school. At EMMS, there was already change in such areas as scheduling, teaming, the use of inter-disciplinary units, and special education services. Now, with Venture Capital funds, these areas, as well as others, could be explored in more depth, and Venture monies could be used to leverage resources to further their school-improvement efforts.

Chapter Two

Collaboration in Corridors, Committees, and Councils

Collaboration — talking, planning, working together for common goals — has been valued for several decades not only by the East Muskingum Middle School staff but also by the entire district and the New Concord community. As noted in Chapter One, the district has a history of providing opportunities for educators, parents, and community members to discuss and reflect on the current status of their schools and to plan for the future. At EMMS, informal conversations in the corridors, — e.g., the halls, teachers' lounge, classroom doorways, grocery store, and swimming pool — have contributed as much to the evolution of the school as the more formal communication networks established by committees and councils that link teachers, grade levels, buildings, parents, and community groups together.

Just as change has been an ongoing process within the middle school, so has the development of building and district communication linkages. Their exploration sheds light on how potential changes were considered, piloted, evaluated, and either discarded or woven into the fabric of the building. Chronicling the use of these networks also points to challenges faced by faculty and staff who take the perspectives of the various stakeholders seriously and are cognizant of their responsibility to the community. This snapshot of the various networks begins with a look at informal communication linkages among individuals and groups and then moves to descriptions of the more formal groups that have been established to promote communication and collaboration, not only within the school but across the district and beyond. More formal groups established to promote communication and collaboration are then described. These include teaching teams, steering committees, staff meetings, focus groups, parent advisory groups, collaboratives with Muskingum College, and districtwide committees.

Conversations in the Corridors

Potential changes have been introduced and even evaluated informally in a variety of corridors. All analysts of EMMS change agree that there is no one group or network in which suggestions are most likely to originate. Extended conversations between parents of EMMS students and their teachers occur fre-

quently, for example, in the aisles of the local grocery store, Shegog's IGA; all stakeholders usually take that type of conversation as seriously as those held in committee and board rooms. The interrelationships among stakeholders all help make chance meetings and common experiences serve as the springboard for informal discussions about their schools. The types of conversations highlighted in this section are those that naturally occur between teachers, between the principal and teachers, between the community and EMMS, between students and teachers, and between EMMS and the local school board and community.

Teacher to Teacher

Conversations about classroom practice and student progress among teachers in the halls, over lunch, and in the work room are commonplace at EMMS. Whereas many junior highs embracing middle school principles had to overcome the mindset of faculty that had always taught what they wanted with their doors shut, EMMS began with an open environment that provides more physical opportunities for informal conversation. This, coupled with teachers who were already district alumni, friends, neighbors, or relatives, perhaps enabled conversations among teachers to occur more spontaneously, frequently, and informally.

One example of ongoing, student-focused conversations among teachers has been the evolution of special education services. A glance back to the mid-1980s would reveal students with specific learning disabilities served in a combination of settings, pulled-out for resource-room instruction for areas in which there were significant academic deficits, and mainstreamed for courses in which either the student had academic strengths or the teachers were willing to make appropriate accommodations. Regular communication was essential for service to be provided, and walks through the corridors during that time period would find teachers of students with specific learning disabilities deeply engrossed in conversations about what particular students needed or how they could supplement the instruction of the regular education teacher.

Along with the new decade came an opportunity for Ohio special education teachers to experiment with new approaches to serving students with disabilities. The Ohio Division of Special Education encouraged districts to pilot one or more of four experimental service-delivery options, which enabled services to be provided across categories of disabilities and across settings. Prior to the piloting of these models, all special education services in Ohio were categorical, and, for the most part, special education teachers provided services in one setting: a separate special education classroom, resource room, or tutoring center. Conversations related to the needs of students with disabilities continued between the entire special education team (two teachers of students with specific learning disabilities [SLD] and one teacher of students with developmental handicaps [DH]) and regular class educators as they asked, "What's best for our kids?" In 1994, EMMS moved to a full-inclusion model for students with specific learning disabilities. These conversations were held not only informally but also formally, as the topic of service-delivery alternatives was one of the first addressed in a series of professional-development seminars entitled Conversation Series.

Collaboration intensified as decisions were made regarding which teachers would have inclusion classrooms and how the special education team — now expanded to four with the addition of a special education aide — could serve 30 to 45 SLD and DH students across four grade levels. To complicate matters, there was early recognition that the lowest functioning students with developmental handicaps would still need some instruction in a separate classroom, so one of the three teachers would always have to be available for those continued pull-out services.

Conversations also intensified as special and regular educators began working together in the same classrooms for the first time. Collaboration ranged from team teaching to tutoring in the back of the classroom to making suggestions. Enthusiasm varied from teacher to teacher, as did success stories with students. After two years of using that model, additional teacher-to-teacher conversation resulted in a move from full inclusion to a model for alternative service-delivery option, where services could be mixed and matched to better meet the needs of not only the students with identified learning disabilities but also those students who were at risk for academic failure or not passing the proficiency test. Since 1996, the special services team has been operating from this model, and much of the expressed success of this individualized approach is due to the continued teacher conversations in the corridors.

Principal to Teacher

Informal conversations between the principal, Doug Winner, and EMMS teachers can be characterized as open and ongoing. Building innovation and change is as readily discussed in casual, drop-by conversations as in formal meetings. Such conversation is initiated from either side and is as likely to focus on small issues such as the nature of the eighth-grade dance as on large issues such as the schedule for the next school year.

For example, one morning in a Building Steering Committee meeting, the suggestion was made for grade-level representatives to go back to their teams and discuss the possibility of creating alternatives to the traditional read-a-thon for raising money for class activities. During one of the team meetings later that day, the team spontaneously planned a spaghetti dinner fundraiser, detailing such issues as possible menu, dates, and job responsibilities. They agreed then that they would run it by the principal later in the day. A later conversation with the principal confirmed the informal approach used. "Then one of them comes to me and says, 'We've just had a really neat discussion. We've got a good idea and we want to do it and here's what it is.'" The principal continues to be viewed as "inviting," and the phrase "keeping the lines of communication open" is more than rhetoric between teachers and administration.

Community to School

The integral relationship between the building and community members and the informality of those communication networks are seen by teachers and administrators as a double-edged sword.

It's a small community, and a lot of people know each other. And there is a pretty good percentage of people on the staff who grew up in this community or have been here a long time. If they didn't grow up here, they've — at least as adults — been here a long time. And there's a close tie in a sense that we are, I think, seen as approachable in any setting. I've been approached after church about school issues. And certainly, at Shegog's IGA — we all kid about that! But the truth is, most of our folks who go in there . . . feel comfortable approaching us about an issue and asking questions about what is going on. So there's a real line of communication — some of it good, some of it gossip. – Doug Winner, Principal

There's a standing joke about the ladies who hang out at the swimming pool with their kids in the summer, who seem to know what teacher is going to teach where before we even know ourselves. But that also adds to that sense that there's input into the operation of the school in a very informal sense. Some of the negative impact, I think, is that because parents feel they can talk to us, then a lot of decision making here, amongst our staff, is influenced by those opinions. And I think we went through some years where things were being discussed as possibilities, and then they got derailed because two or three parents would call and say, "I'm upset about this new program or that new program" or [when they would] have some very serious questions. – A teacher

The community-to-school communication is a two-way street. Just as community members feel comfortable contacting teachers or administrators with questions or concerns, teachers know that it will be beneficial to discuss with those outside the building walls what questions or concerns they as teachers have. This is illustrated by a veteran EMMS teacher: "I've been here 20 years, teaching at this school, and there has been a constant emphasis on letting parents know." Later in the same conversation, Doug mentioned how other EMMS staff members also serve an integral role in sharing ideas with the public: "Long before it [came into] vogue to do this, the district brought cooks, custodians, secretaries, transportation supervisors, and bus drivers to gatherings with the teachers and treated them equally, since they are key communicators to the public."

Community to School to Board

The informal conversations between community members and board members and between school staff and board members are just as valued by all constituencies. Parents are probably more apt to call a board member at home than to schedule a time to speak formally at a school board meeting. And the board members are likely to respond to the parents by encouraging them to call the teacher or other staff member directly involved in the situation.

When [board members] are confronted by a parent about a concern or something that's made them angry . . . their first response is . . . "you need to go talk to the principal,"

> *or "you need to talk to the teacher first, then the principal." They don't try to handle those problems. They don't bring them in [to the board meetings] and, likewise, we don't have to communicate so formally with them, either.* – Doug Winner, Principal

Another variable in the communication patterns across the district is that the East Muskingum school district is a non-union district, the only one in the region. The significance of being a non-unionized district is captured in the following discussion among Doug, Pat Bennett, and John Smith related to the impact that significant community involvement has on the rate and type of change.

> *We are non-union. And we don't want to be union. We see great things happen because we are non-union. And I don't mean that in terms of taking advantage of employees; I mean it in terms of the relationships we have and our ability to accomplish things together.* – Doug Winner, Principal

Because the district is a non-union district, all district stakeholders — administrators, teachers, and board members alike — agree that they must work harder to disseminate information, seek input, and build consensus, since no master agreement ensures such communication linkages.

Student to Teacher

Although informal conversations among teachers and students obviously occur in many types of corridors, the ways in which students have formal input and feedback are limited to student council and exit interviews with the principal that focus on "your best memory and your worst memory of EMMS." According to Doug, there were "many controversial discussions in Venture Capital committee meetings about the need for student involvement." Even though external Venture Capital evaluation reports advanced "student input in the change process" as a continued need, there was not consensus among the staff that students need to be formally involved in making decisions regarding the change process. Some teachers wondered "whether kids would care or even understand things like Venture Capital 'indicators of success.'" Others felt that the time for these types of conversations was being eaten away by the pressure to spend every extra minute making sure as many students as possible could pass the Ohio Proficiency Tests.

The above descriptions of conversations held among EMMS stakeholders illustrate an open climate that provides many opportunities for informally airing and discussing perceived needs and concerns and proposed solutions. People within the district are sensitive to and value the need for such informal communication among groups prior to bringing issues or proposals to a more formal, decision-making table. And it is evident that these conversations often result in issues being addressed and changes being made without needing to be reviewed in a more formal context.

Conversations in Teams, Committees, and Councils

In addition to the above informal conversations that take place in the corridors across settings, there are a variety of more formal collaborative structures within the building, across the district, and among school and community groups. These include EMMS teaching teams, a Building Steering Committee, a Venture Capital Steering Committee, Venture Capital focus groups, staff meetings, parent advisory councils and booster groups, collaboratives between EMMS and Muskingum College, and districtwide advisory committees and administrative team meetings. Although they are distinct entities, they cannot be viewed as completely separate from the informal networks, because in the New Concord area many people serve in a variety of roles. In one instance, an individual could be responding as a parent; in a second instance, as a board member; and in a third instance, as the chair of some type of community committee.

Grade-Level Teaming

Teaching Teams

One structure that has had a very significant impact on EMMS is the teaching team. EMMS has four to seven members on each grade-level team, one team for each grade (grades five through eight), an arts team, and a special-services team. Many of the formal conversations that have served as an impetus for change or evaluation of change have originated in these team structures. At EMMS, grade-level teams and the arts team have a team preparation period daily. Over the years, special education teachers have been assigned to grade-level teams in different ways, depending upon such things as the number of special-services team members, available planning times, and the number of students with identified disabilities. With the recent addition of a fourth special education teacher, they are each assigned to one grade-level team.

The nature of the teaching teams has varied over the years. Prior to 1984, teachers taught multiple subjects to multiple grade levels. Teachers' loads averaged 150 to 160 students. In 1984, grade-level teams were established that limited teachers' instruction to students at one grade level. However, teachers continued to teach 150 to 170 students in eight 40-minute-period classes throughout the day, without shared planning periods.

Team responsibilities changed again in 1993, when a number of middle school practices were adopted, including 80-minute instructional blocks of time, with mathematics and language arts taught in year-long blocks, and science and social studies taught for one semester each. Additional practices implemented included team preparation periods and assignment of entire groups of students in one grade level to a specific team of teachers, which halved the student load but increased the class size to approx-

imately 35 students. At each grade level, there were two teams of three teachers each, teaching mathematics, language arts, and either social studies or science to their group of students, and there was an intervention period, an arts block, and an 80-minute team preparation period each day (for individual and team planning).

Concerns about class size, student progress, and scheduling difficulties led teachers to reconsider the structure and function of their teaching teams, resulting in each grade-level tailoring their team to more specifically address grade-level needs. Changes in the teams were interwoven with schedule changes, which had an impact across grade levels. Embedded within the schedule-change discussions was the question of whether to continue the practice of block scheduling. The discussion of block scheduling led teachers and administrators to raise critical questions regarding the effectiveness of having longer periods of time for instruction.

For the 1996-97 school year, the fifth-grade team changed to three teams of two teachers each, even though the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teams remained the same. Fifth-grade teachers agreed to "experiment for two years in a team-teaching situation of three teams of two teachers." Fifth-grade teachers felt that by working in pairs with only one-third of the students instead of three teachers working with one-half of the students, they would get to know their students better.

Observations of the three teams revealed that each pair of fifth-grade teachers approached teaming differently. Collaborative activities varied from joint classroom instruction as two teachers combined their classes into one large group, to an arrangement in which one teacher provided instruction to the combined two classes while the other monitored classroom behavior and occasionally added to the discussion. A third pattern of teaming made use of flexible grouping across the two classes. The approaches varied within and among teams, with the level of joint instruction often dependent upon the content area. The practice of combining two classes for instruction doubled the classroom space for each team but also doubled the number of students. One team indicated that this arrangement was "less stressful with two teachers . . . even though it is a larger class [60 to 65 students]."

The fifth-grade teams saw many advantages to the arrangement, which had been in place for nearly a year at the time of the study, summarizing those advantages as follows: "We benefit from ideas and support of each other"; "nothing slips through the cracks because someone else sees it"; and "one person can keep the group occupied while one is working intensely with a small group." They noted disadvantages also, including "teaching out of their subject specialties"; "dealing with 65, not 35, kids at a time," becoming "isolated teams, where we are not all together."

For the 1997-98 school year, the eighth-grade team decided to move to 60-minute blocks of time, with all courses lasting a full year. This change dropped class size from the mid-30s to the mid-20s, a primary goal of the change. The following is taken from a discussion that EMMS staff members on the TLC research team had with Catherine Glascock and project directors near the end of the TLC pro-

ject year. Pat Bennett, John Smith, and Doug Winner were talking about how the grade-level teams were feeling "empowered" to make decisions about what was best for their grade levels, illustrating this sense of empowerment with the example of the eighth-grade team moving from the 80- to 60-minute instructional periods.

> **Catherine:** *What was the process [the eighth-grade team] went through to determine that the block wasn't working for them, and that they wanted to move?*
>
> **John:** *It was driven more by class size, I believe.*
>
> **Doug:** *I'm glad to hear you say that, because if there is a thread that I have tried to see in this, it is empowerment of the teaching teams. I've always felt that a lot of decision making does happen at the team level. So, to come back to your question about process, a lot of discussion occurred over a year's time about class size, the number of kids in the classroom, versus the way we were scheduled. And, is there a different way to do the schedule that would lower class size, but not lose everything like team time and everything else that we've been trying to do? And really, it was primarily their discussion; I saw my role as that of asking critical questions — Have you thought of this? What do you think the reaction to that would be? Is it best for kids? How will this negatively or positively affect student performance? . . . They really developed the schedule themselves with my input and assistance . . . . And then we started to set it up and began to ask a new set of questions — What does this mean for the rest of the building when you do this and this and this?*

Team members did not always agree. Doug explained what happened when there was one dissenter during the discussions about moving from double-blocked, semester-long courses to the year-long, 60-minute periods, indicating that he did not intervene. Instead, "I stepped down, and let them just discuss, talk, discuss, talk . . . And, although they did not get into any knock-down drag-outs, they arrived at a decision." They agreed to compromise for the sake of the team. "You know — kind of a reluctant, 'I don't know that I'm going to like this, but I'll do it for the team.' That's a great step in teaming."

John agreed, "And I think that's happened a lot on our team over the years."

The current arrangement of teams, with their differing lengths of classes and class schedules, creates the picture of four mini-schools within a school, where each team has considerable scheduling autonomy in determining who teaches what for how long of a period of time. Such flexible and individualized arrangements have required negotiations among teams — certainly a form of collaboration.

Some intra-team changes have had only a ripple effect on other teams. The ripple effect is evident as teachers plan for the 1998-99 school year. For example, the sixth- and seventh-grade teams are talking about following the example of the eighth-grade team in going to shorter periods in order to provide a full year of social studies and science. One suggestion is to have 40-minute periods where they

flip-flop the same group of students with an occasional 80-minute period when a particular lesson or activity requires it. The fifth-grade teachers also are reconsidering some of their integrated activities and having more discrete courses and assignments to focus more on critical knowledge and performance objectives. Each team will develop its own way to organize the school day without requiring consensus with other teams regarding a common schedule.

The following summarizes the evolution of teaching teams over the past 15 years:

Pre-1984: Teachers teaching multiple subjects to multiple grade levels. Teaching loads of 150 to 160 students.

1984-93: Established grade-level teams so teachers taught at only one grade level. Teaching loads remained high. Forty-minute periods. No shared preparation time.

1993-96: Stayed with grade-level teams. Moved to 80-minute, full-year instructional blocks for mathematics and language arts and 80-minute, single-semester blocks for science and social studies. Established common team planning time in addition to individual planning time. Split each grade level in two so that at each grade level there were two teams of three teachers teaching one-half of the students. Added an intervention period.

1996-97: Fifth-grade team split into three teams of two teachers on each team. Each pair of teachers had one-third of the students. All other arrangements remained the same.

1997-98: Fifth grade continued 1996-97 arrangement. Eighth-grade team moved to 60-minute classes with all courses lasting a full year. Class size dropped from mid-30s to mid-20s for the eighth grade.

Plans for 1998-99: Sixth grade will move to 60-minute periods with all classes lasting a full year. Eighth grade will continue those practices. Seventh grade will continue with 80-minute blocks for mathematics and language arts, but a third block will be split into two 40-minute periods for full-year science and social studies. Fifth grade will continue with three teams of two teachers who can use their time flexibly and group their one-third of the students.

A significant benefit from enabling teams to have more autonomy is that within the four mini-schools, innovations can flourish without requiring buildingwide acceptance or approval. For example, the eighth grade's move to 60-minute periods was a drastic change that occurred without noticeable impact on the other teams which continue to experiment with 40- or 80-minute blocks. Here again the ripple effect comes into play, this time in a very positive fashion: as other teachers at different grade levels watch — first from afar, and then more closely, — they consider the relevance and applicability of another team's practices for their students.

The evolution of grade-level teams has had a significant impact at EMMS. More recent grade-level team arrangements have resulted in greater autonomy for each teaching team and in grade-specific changes such as smaller class sizes for grade eight and greater flexibility for instruction in grade five. The ripple effect from changes within a grade level have often had a positive impact on practice at other grade levels. And, even when a grade-specific change has had the potential of having a negative impact on other grade-level teams, the teams have been able to work out their differences, again pointing to the importance of the many informal and formal communication networks.

Grade-Level Team Meetings with the Principal

Grade-level teams have regular communication with the principal through weekly grade-level meetings held with him during each team's common planning period. These meetings focus on team and grade-specific issues and have regularly included such agenda items as writing intervention plans for at-risk students, determining needs of students with disabilities, and grade-level planning, including trips, interdisciplinary units, and special activities. Thus, the team members meet together three or four times per week during their common planning period, and then they meet with the principal during the fifth planning period. As in the informal conversations, the discussions can be teacher- or principal-initiated, with both approaches valued.

Building-wide Collaborative Structures

Building Steering Committee

In 1990, the principal, Jack Hazard, initiated a Building Steering Committee consisting of one representative from each grade-level team, the arts team, the special services team, and the office staff. The key functions of the Building Steering Committee are to communicate information, share team plans that may have an impact on other teams, and deal with issues relating to daily operation. The committee is chaired by the principal and meets on a regular basis.

This committee is valued by staff as an efficient way to communicate across grade levels, since not all teachers view teaching teams as always facilitating communication.

> *I sometimes sense that it's kind of like having a cousin that lives in Detroit. There are people in the building that I rarely see during the week because of our schedules. But yet, they are only a phone call away or I can just go see them if I need to do so. They're aware of what's happening on the periphery in the building, and I think I've seen our staff respond strongly during crisis periods or other things that unite us. And there are times that we disagree a lot, but we discuss things openly in meetings . . . all the time.* – A teacher

The building-wide steering committee addresses this concern that "we don't see many people in the building beyond our team" (John) and that the current teaming arrangements sometimes "create competition among teams."

Venture Capital Steering Committee

A second building steering committee was established in 1994 when the building was awarded a Venture Capital Grant. This group, known as the Venture Capital Steering Committee, was charged with planning, implementing, and monitoring professional development activities and changes in curriculum, instruction, structure, and governance related to any Venture Capital initiatives. The committee comprised six teachers, one from each team, and three administrators: the principal, assistant principal, and guidance counselor.

Originally, membership on the Venture Capital Steering Committee was to change yearly, with new team representatives appointed each spring for the next school year. By the second year of the grant, the Venture Capital Steering Committee agreed that there needed to be more continuity from year to year and asked teachers to make commitments to serve on the committee for the remainder of the grant cycle. Additionally, Venture Capital consultants and evaluators were often invited to Venture Capital Steering Committee meetings, sometimes to discuss issues of teacher concern, other times to document the Venture Capital process and the building's progress for evaluation purposes.

Initially, the Venture Capital Steering Committee oversaw all Venture Capital building initiatives, provided two-way communication with building teams, and ensured that Venture Capital funds were allocated and spent consistently with Venture Capital objectives. Toward the end of the grant period, purposes expanded to include prioritizing and coordinating Venture Capital activities and expenditures. Both the Building Steering Committee and the Venture Capital Steering Committee were chaired by the principal and met on a regular basis once a month, although special meetings were readily called as needs arose.

Focus Groups

Toward the end of the third year of the Venture Capital initiative, the Venture Capital Steering Committee began to wrestle with whether or not they needed to establish topic and funding priorities for the remainder of the grant period. From the inception of the project, every EMMS teacher had been allotted $250 for the professional-development activities of his/her choice, with few strings attached other than to document the choices on a learning wall and in the team journals.

By the time planning for the fourth grant year began, most members of the steering committee believed prioritization would help focus involvement in professional-development activities and use of Venture Capital funds. Additionally, the Ohio Department of Education project evaluators had encouraged all Venture buildings to reduce the number of indicators of success to just the ones that were viewed as the most critical to the future success of learners in their buildings. However, there were

enough EMMS teachers who were concerned that the topics "wouldn't help me in my subject area," and that "they wouldn't get 'their money,'" that the development of issue or topic-oriented focus groups stalled until near the end of year four.

During the fourth year, four topics were selected for focus group study: parent/community involvement, technology, reading intervention, and proficiency testing. And Venture Capital Indicators of Success were revised to focus on these areas. Teachers were given the opportunity to choose the focus group that most interested them, and collaboration was encouraged among focus-group members as they identified their goals and objectives and decided how their share of the Venture Capital funds should be spent. An innovation that grew out of the focus group on reading intervention was the piloting of a corrective reading program for students with significant deficits in basic reading skills. The introduction of this program is chronicled in Chapter Three as an example of the building's use of inquiry to make curricular decisions.

Actually, the interrelatedness of many of the informal and formal communication networks can be highlighted through a discussion of the adoption of the corrective reading program. As special and regular educators collaborated in inclusive classroom settings, they informally talked about the common reading difficulties their non-identified low readers shared with many of the students identified as SLD. These conversations led to more formal discussions of reading deficits in team meetings, grade-level meetings, and Building Steering Committee meetings. Widespread interest in this topic led to its selection as a key focus for the 1996-97 Conversation Series. Informal conversations and formal presentations related to alternative reading interventions led to a group of teachers requesting that reading intervention be selected as a key focus of grant activities and funds and asking permission to pilot the use of a reading-intervention program with selected groups of students.

Having a few select foci serve as priorities for grant activities and funds remained a stumbling block for a few teachers. "Although agreeing that the focus groups provided direction for professional development, instructional changes, et cetera, several were concerned that the focus topics unintentionally excluded some subject area teachers" (Morrow, 1998). It was difficult for others to realize that the fate of their focus group was truly in their own hands. This was aptly summarized in the following comment by Doug: "It took people a little while in some of those groups to realize that they really were on their own, that they really could determine the direction of the focus, and that they really could spend the money the way they wanted." He also indicated that it was sometimes difficult to remember his new role with these four groups. He referred to his return to the historical administrator mind-set in the following:

> *I made some mistakes, because I said it was theirs, the [Venture Capital] money, and about a month ago, I realized that I had indeed gone ahead and operated like a traditional administrator and expended some money out of different accounts, without checking with the whole group. And . . . it was a natural thing I'm used to doing. I'm used to having that ultimate authority over that, and I did it without thinking. So I went back to them, just in recent weeks, and said, "You know, I goofed up, and I need to show you where your money stands*

> *and what I've charged off to your account and why, and if there's a serious problem with this, let me know and I'll try to find a resource of funding. I don't want it to cause your group to get in an uproar." And then I've said to myself, "Doug, anything that you need, or if there's something you think the school needs, for the proficiency focus group or the parent community focus group, you've got to take it to them and let them wrestle with that. And, if they say no, you've got to live with that."* – Doug Winner, Principal

Staff Meetings and Retreats

Another formal structure used to encourage collaboration is regularly scheduled teachers' meetings which serve as large-group forums for the consideration of building-wide issues and concerns, e.g., next year's schedule or whether to continue with intervention homerooms. At EMMS, teachers meet periodically for one hour after school. Additionally, during the Venture Capital years, Venture funds were used to provide full faculty retreats in the summers of 1994, 1995, and 1996. (By summer 1997 the faculty had decided to spend more of their Venture funds on activities related to specific topics, rather than general faculty professional-development activities.)

A third significant means through which the full faculty has been able to meet is through ODE-approved release days for professional development. For the past four years, two or three release days during the school year have been authorized for professional-development purposes. Although all stakeholders agree that full faculty meetings are important, the challenge to EMMS is how to come to consensus about any one innovation and change when it is difficult for the entire faculty to get together frequently.

School and Community Collaborative Structures

EMMS Parents' Advisory Council

EMMS parents have a number of formal structures through which they can provide input and feedback. During the early years of the middle school, the EMMS Parents' Advisory Council was formed by the principal to provide input and feedback on all types of middle school issues, as well as to serve as a direct communication link to the broader community. This voluntary group, made up of parents and guardians of students across grade levels, met three to four times each year. In his discussion with the Transforming Learning Communities researchers regarding stakeholders involved in the decision-making process, Doug commented on the value of the group.

> *[They] have been a great group of about 20 to 25 parents each year. I don't do a formal presentation when they come, but rather I bring out issues that we are dealing with and that we are trying to make decisions on. They wrestle with them, ask questions, and get into heated arguments amongst themselves.* – Doug Winner, Principal

Doug indicated that sometimes the arguments are philosophical in nature, specifying the example of their ongoing discussion about proficiency testing. "How much time [should be spent on preparation]? How much attention in the curriculum should be given to the test content?"

EMMS Academic Boosters

During the mid-1980s, another parent group was formed at the middle school. This group was designed to provide a variety of types of resources for EMMS activities that could not be supported through existing building and district resources. Over the years, groups ranging in size from 20 to 40 have provided significant financial support to special class projects and funding teacher equipment and supply requests for which no funds are available. The group has also donated their its and talents to EMMS endeavors ranging from schoolwide fundraisers to career days.

Parent and Community Focus Group

The most recently established parent group grew out of one of the Venture Capital Indicators of Success, that is, to increase parent and community involvement. During the fourth year of the Venture Capital initiative, EMMS became a member of the Ohio Classroom Management Project, which was designed to assist school teams in selecting one of six possible areas that impact classroom environment and in creating a plan to meet perceived needs. The committee was composed of parents, teachers, a secretary, a cook, a bus driver, and the principal.

The group first created a school mission statement: "Embrace the Spirit — Empower the Mind." Then it selected parent/community involvement as a planning area. The next step was the development of a survey that was distributed to parents and the entire community at the beginning of the 1997-98 school year. In response to the survey, the committee developed additional ways for parents and community members to be involved in the ongoing life of the school during school hours. Although EMMS parents believed they had considerable input in decision making and that their concerns were heard and usually addressed, they had limited ways to volunteer within the building. However, that is changing. The percentage of community members who volunteer during the school day has increased by approximately 30% during the 1997-98 school year. Additionally, these individuals serve as direct communication links to the broader community.

Partnerships with Muskingum College

Early and Ongoing Collaboration

There is a wide variety of informal and formal connections between East Muskingum Schools and Muskingum College, located only a stone's throw from three of the five district buildings, including EMMS. The history of collaborations with the college extend back to when the buildings were constructed. Over the years, the college library, science laboratories, football stadium, track, and meeting

rooms have been shared with the district. Likewise, all five district buildings have opened their classrooms to teacher-education students at Muskingum, providing strong, positive field experience and student-teaching sites. Selected teachers in these buildings serve as site-based supervisors for their field-experience students and student teachers. On a regular basis, faculty across disciplines has consulted, both informally and formally, with EMMS staff, as well as with educators across the district. And probably just as significant have been the ongoing conversations among college faculty whose children attend EMMS and teachers' offspring who attend the college.

Within the last decade, there have been several more formal collaborations between the college and EMMS. These have included teacher-education students (with faculty assistance) presenting disability-awareness sessions for all sixth graders, providing after-school intervention-tutoring, serving as Odyssey of the Mind coaches and assistants, and hosting eighth-grade career-awareness days at the college. Currently EMMS and the college are collaborating on a project funded by AT&T to review and adapt the college's on-line Learning Strategies Database (Center for the Advancement of Learning, 1997) for use with middle school students.

The "Conversation Series"

Teachers agree that the collaborative activity with Muskingum College that has had the most significant impact on their most recent change initiatives began a year prior to Venture Capital. At the request of Dr. James Mahoney, the district superintendent at that time, a graduate program offering was piloted in the district. Entitled Conversation Series, it had the expressed purposes of enabling teachers to identify common concerns, share ideas, explore relevant issues and trends in education, and enhance their professional knowledge and skills. Through a series of graduate seminars whose direction was determined jointly by the teacher-participants and the instructor, individuals earned two semester hours of graduate credit for participating in at least eight three-hour, topic-specific sessions; completing related professional reading; writing reflections on the sessions with a focus on incorporating theory into practice; and completing a capstone project.

The first Conversation Series held during the 1993-94 school year was made available to teachers across the district and addressed a number of issues teachers raised the first evening of class, such as school reform, inclusive practice, alternative assessment, and scheduling options. Then, during the 1994-95 school year, EMMS requested a building-specific Conversation Series, which provided opportunities for EMMS teachers to explore middle school topics and practices and to collaborate in the application of their learning. The Conversation Series continued, with at least one being offered in all but one of the last five years. Another Conversation Series is planned for spring semester 1999. The positive value of the Conversation Series for promoting collaboration and inquiry into classroom practice was a theme identified by teachers, building and district administrators, Venture Capital evaluators, and Transforming Learning Community case-study members alike. The nature and impact of the Conversation Series is addressed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

District-wide Collaborative Structures

Superintendent's Advisory Committee

Just as EMMS has had a parents' advisory group almost since its inception, the district at large has had a similar group. Begun in 1987, the Superintendent's Advisory Committee is made up of 12 individuals who serve a two-year term. They are appointed by the school board and represent a variety of ages, occupations, and areas of the district. The group meets four times a year for purposes similar to the EMMS Parents' Advisory Committee, with the focus being on districtwide issues. However, as in other corridors, middle school questions or issues are often raised and then referred to individuals or groups best able to address the concerns. And, conversely, the committee members also serve as another direct communication link to the community.

East Muskingum Administrative Team

A significant collaborative forum across buildings is the district's administrative team, comprising all building principals, the assistant superintendent, the superintendent, the middle and high school assistant principals, and the district-services coordinator. This group meets once a month and has a yearly summer retreat. Additionally, there is a principals-only monthly meeting, with additional meetings scheduled on an as-needed basis. The team's role in EMMS collaboration is to provide input and feedback to Doug through the lens of the members' own buildings, often bringing up new perspectives on some of the more problematic issues. For example, team discussions surrounding proficiency-test issues have provided additional information for building-level decisions about the provision of intervention services, curriculum alignment with proficiency-test objectives, and proficiency-test preparation.

Formal collaborative structures among stakeholders are not new to the building or district. As noted earlier, the non-union nature of the district may contribute greatly to the need to develop effective and efficient communication networks, since there are no formal lines of communication normally found in negotiated agreements. Additionally, a new layer of building-wide collaborative structures was introduced with Venture Capital. Although such networks appeared to enhance the implementation of Venture Capital initiatives, they had to find their place in the web of existing networks, since teachers were more familiar and comfortable with the more decentralized team-based collaboration structures which had served as a key impetus for change for so many years.

Collaboration, Change, and the Role of the Principal

The principal's role has emerged as a crucial variable in many studies of school change (Fullan, 1991). At EMMS, as in many other schools, the principal's role is a complex one, and there are few road maps to guide a principal in facilitating a positive environment for change. The principal has to balance so many often-

competing demands such as maintaining the day-to-day school operation; ensuring the school's accountability to curriculum standards, including proficiency tests; responding to the voices of parents, teachers, and board; and doing all of this within the constraints of limited time and budget resources. Add to this the fact that stakeholders frequently disagree about the direction in which changes should be made. It is no wonder that Doug often struggles with how to most effectively lead the EMMS staff in its efforts to improve.

A critical element in teacher-initiated curriculum change is an administrator who believes that curriculum development is an appropriate role for teachers and who gives practical support in that role (Martin, 1999). Doug treats teachers as peers and allows them a great deal of autonomy in making curriculum decisions. At the same time, he tries to exercise leadership by bringing up important questions and raising critical issues. These issues can arise from many sources. Doug mentioned, for example, that parents might contact him with concerns about homework, especially single parents who have little time to help their children. After hearing this concern several times, he would pose questions to staff. How much homework should kids have? What kind of homework? He explained, "My role as a principal is to get [teachers] to think critically. Sometimes there's no recognition that there is a problem until critical questions are asked." As one teacher put it, "Doug is the sand in the oyster."

His role, therefore, is one of leadership but also one of collaboration with fellow professionals who, share his concern for students' needs. He facilitates teacher collaboration in many ways. He brings people together formally in meetings such as those of the Building Steering Committee, weekly grade-level meetings, and committees formed for special needs. At these meetings and when talking with individuals, he intentionally summarizes and reflects on what he hears, poses thought-provoking questions, and contributes new perspectives. Less formally, he also assumes the role of communication agent among the teams; otherwise, the teams find few opportunities to talk with each other during the school day. He extends teacher communication through visual images in the school building. For example, when the school was developing its mission statement, he posted the various teams' drafts on the wall in the teachers' lounge to facilitate synthesis of a final draft. During Venture Capital activities, he encouraged teachers to note the conferences, courses, or workshops they had attended or the schools they had visited.

Doug is aware that teacher commitment to any kind of curriculum change depends a great deal on the concerns and priorities of individuals, as well as on their professional strengths and dispositions. He believes that he can lead teachers in considering the need for change, but if teachers are not convinced that the envisioned change is desirable and doable for them at a particular time, then they will not buy into it. "I really put a high value on what the teacher believes is good for kids... I also believe that if I dictated, chances are it's not going to be done — or done, but not believed in — so it's not done in the best way."

Doug recalled that when he first became principal, teams were required to do two interdisciplinary units each year. When teachers came to him and asked, "Do we still have to do that?" he said, "Yes." However, when he was asked again two years later, he replied, "If it still has to be a rule . . . then obviously you don't see the benefits of it, you don't believe in it . . . and I'm not going to legislate it any more."

However, almost every team continues to use interdisciplinary units that would seem to support Doug's belief that "true ownership in institutionalization of change comes when they believe in it and they take ownership for it."

The decisions of teams and individuals do not always coincide with Doug's assessment of sound educational practice. In such cases, he says he makes sure that all aspects of the problem are discussed, listens to the rationale that the team presents, and then "buys into what the team wants." When team members disagree, he tends to let them negotiate among themselves until they reach a solution, rather than mediating the situation. This sometimes means that when the majority of the staff reaches a decision about a specific change, the change can be blocked indefinitely until consensus is reached.

Doug explained that it was very difficult at EMMS to bring consensus to the whole group. On any topic, "you name it, they'll vote 50-50 . . . and so I purposely try to limit those times of conflict and disagreement — to limit the times when the whole building has to move together on an issue, and to let teams do what they want to do, outside of what's happening elsewhere." This is one of the reasons that teams are able to have wide variations in scheduling arrangements. Some teachers are not entirely comfortable with this leadership style, expressing a desire for Doug to take a stronger position.

> *Some people may say, "Gee, I wish he'd be more decisive. I wish he'd just tell us what to do. It's so much easier." And I can do that, but it doesn't seem to work out.*
> *– Doug Winner, Principal*

This again illustrates his faith in teachers' ultimate commitment to do what's best for kids.

The Challenge

At EMMS, collaboration occurs both informally and systematically across corridors, teams, committees, and councils. Parents trust teachers, teachers value community input, the board values teacher decisions and honors administrator recommendations, and teachers recognize each other as resources. These communication links and collaborative structures provide channels for sharing information and feedback that help to shape decisions and determine what the school becomes.

However, the degree of impact that such interrelated forms of communication have on building change is influenced by the tension between honoring teacher autonomy and implementing changes grounded in research, theory, and best practice. Norms of collegiality within the building support working hard to build team consensus, at least on such issues and activities as scheduling, use of instructional time, teaching assignments, and use of space. Such norms do not yet include issues related to teacher instructional practice, assessment, or accommodations, with the individual teacher having the final say in what happens in his or her own classroom.

Chapter Three

The Role of Inquiry at EMMS

Inquiry, both formal and informal, has played an important role in the change process at East Muskingum Middle School (EMMS). Just as the changes have been ongoing, rather than cataclysmic, inquiry has been ongoing and embedded in teachers' practice and their professional relationships. In the everyday life of the school, inquiry tends to be situational, pragmatic, experiential, and conversational. It happens in the community as teachers interact with friends and neighbors. It takes place in the corridors as teachers consult and plan with each other how they may best meet students' needs. And it happens between the principal and teachers as they address critical questions about curriculum and organization.

In this chapter, the inquiry process at EMMS is explored in several forms within these various contexts. First, there is a discussion of the informal processes of inquiry that are directed toward studying and evaluating current practices. Such inquiry may be internal as the school studies itself, or it may originate externally. EMMS has been continuously engaged in studying "what we are doing and how things are going," and the community, too, often raises questions of this kind.

This chapter also reflects on how the inquiry process conducted as a part of Venture Capital illustrates the uses and challenges of a more formal process. The effort to develop tools and procedures to conduct evaluation and self-study in a formal way was carried out alongside the less formal culture of inquiry that already existed at EMMS. The conversations that occurred as these tools and methods were developed often were themselves a useful form of inquiry. Finally, teachers' professional development is discussed as still another type of inquiry.

Studying What We Are Doing

In the Community

Parents and others in the community have a very real role in the inquiry that precedes any changes at EMMS. Very few changes of any importance occur without taking into account how such changes will

be received by the community. Structures such as the Parent Advisory Group and the Parent and Community Task Force provide forums in which parents' voices can be heard. In these meetings, there is often discussion of issues with which the school is dealing. While parents are not the decision makers in these instances, their opinions form an important data source for school personnel to consider.

These same kinds of data are collected outside of formal groups. Social gatherings and encounters at the local swimming pool, grocery store, church, or even the local auto shop provide informal mechanisms for testing the waters for proposed school innovations or for getting feedback on public perceptions of current practices. Reactions here may also promote teacher inquiry, because there is a need for more information to enable them to provide parents and others with a rationale for specific changes.

In the Corridors

Teachers raise critical questions about their teaching and their students with each other, both formally and informally. With questions ranging from, "Is this the best use of our instructional time?" to "What other approaches can we use to get Johnny to read?" they question, reflect on, and challenge the value of what they are doing. The phrase "what's best for kids," first used during Jack Hazard's term as principal, permeates the vast majority of teacher-to-teacher reflective discussions and often serves as the springboard for critical analysis.

When the staff wrote their initial Venture Capital Grant proposal, they indicated that although they were "committed to adapting [their] instructional modes . . . they discovered a lack of critical instructional skills essential for making their adaptations possible" (Morrow, 1996). They decided to expand their knowledge of and skills in various instructional strategies through attendance at conferences and workshops, visits to other schools, and participation in the Conversation Series.

The collaboration that occurs among the principal and teachers or teams sometimes leads to a process of inquiry when they begin to explore critical questions. Decisions, such as those described earlier regarding teaming, are made on the basis of information gathered from many sources. It is this kind of inquiry that leads to the introduction of new practices and structures or to the reexamining, refining, or discarding of old ones.

In the Classrooms

The process that led to the adoption of a new reading program is a good example of how inquiry of this kind happens at EMMS and how such inquiry has been enhanced by Venture Capital. The grant provided the time, context, and funds that enabled teachers to move from the inquiry that took place in natural, informal conversations to explorations outside EMMS for solutions to identified problems.

Teachers at various grade levels had expressed a growing concern over the difficulty students had

in reading material in their content areas. Comments such as the following were heard: "It's not just the special education kids who can't read"; "The proficiency test is a reading test!" Language arts teachers began to discuss the fact that, while the elementary focus was learning to read and the middle school focus was reading to learn, EMMS had a number of students reading well below grade level, and in some cases not reading at all.

The problem was discussed in several Conversation Series seminars. Teachers suggested possible causes for the problem, and options for addressing it began to be explored. Additional Conversation Series sessions included a demonstration of phonics instruction and a short workshop on content-area reading strategies. Outside the classes, information gathering continued. Contacts were made with elementary schools, another school system, and the Muskingum Valley Educational Services Center to find out what programs were being explored or used. Staff members also attended the Ohio Middle School Conference, seeking ideas for reading programs. As the special education team investigated reading instructional approaches, they found a journal article that referred to a specific direct-instruction reading program said to be producing promising results in a school district in another state. They contacted a teacher in another Ohio district who had been using the program and who recommended it and gave suggestions for implementation. A consultant for the program was then invited to the school to provide a workshop for interested teachers in the district.

The program was adopted, and during summer 1997 teachers were trained in its use. Teachers reported several reasons for adopting this program. The fact that it was scripted meant that teachers did not have to have extensive background in teaching reading. They were convinced that it had worked in other schools. Teachers liked the materials and liked the fact that training was part of the package. Three teachers piloted the program during the first semester of the 1997-98 school year. By the second semester, one more fifth-grade teacher and one sixth-grade teacher also utilized the program. During 1998-99, only the two seventh-grade teachers and three of the four special education teachers used the program. At this time there does not seem to be a plan to expand the reading program into other grade levels.

Inquiry Through Venture Capital Assessment

Although inquiry of an informal nature was always occurring at EMMS, the school and the district also valued more formal procedures. The Venture Capital Grant offered the opportunity to increase the use of both kinds of inquiry. Inquiry which was carried on internally by the teachers themselves included all the ways that school personnel could look at themselves and at students in order to evaluate what they were doing; external evaluations provided a variety of lenses through which they and others could view the success of change efforts.

The idea of evaluation was not a foreign concept at EMMS. The building had a history of involvement with grants and other formal school-improvement initiatives. Because East Muskingum Local Schools initially was one of only two districts in Ohio where all of the district schools were involved in Venture Capital initiatives, the district administration felt a keen sense of responsibility to thoroughly document and evaluate all five building-level efforts. And, as noted earlier, the district had consistently engaged in self-reflection and evaluation to facilitate ongoing improvement. The districtwide, yet building-specific local evaluation plan was to be different from, yet complement, any other evaluation process. The district established an evaluation team, which originally included Dr. Crystal Gipps, an Ohio University faculty member, Dr. Michael Fuller, a school psychologist with the Muskingum Valley Educational Services Center; and Dr. Linda Morrow. Within the next year, Dr. Judy Van Voorhis, also a Muskingum College faculty member, replaced Dr. Gipps on the team when Dr. Gipps moved out of the state. Although the entire team worked on districtwide evaluation activities, each team member was assigned to one or two buildings for building-specific evaluation activities.

Because of her previous work with EMMS, Linda Morrow continued to be involved with Venture Capital at that school. Her role as an evaluation team member highlights the value that the district placed on formal inquiry into change initiatives. She describes the inquiry process from her perspective as a member of that team.

Linda's Story

We began our work in the fall of 1994 at the beginning of the second year of the initiatives, and we continued to work together to look at building-level progress and districtwide impact and concerns throughout the five years. None of us was new to the district when we assumed our roles as external evaluators. Dr. Fuller and Dr. Van Voorhis had been professionally involved with the district for close to two decades. My own professional and personal experiences had been intertwined with building and district faculty and staff for nearly 30 years, from high school student to research consultant. Even our initial considerations about how to evaluate school reform were embedded in years of experience with and a relatively long history of the district.

We were excited about serving the district, hoping to uncover, explore, analyze, and interpret what was happening across and within all five buildings. But we knew we faced many challenges, challenges that actually increased as the years passed. What we were trying to accomplish and the concerns we had are summarized in the following excerpt from the East Muskingum Schools Mid-Grant Evaluation Summary:

> *Over the past year and a half, our efforts have focused on developing a comprehensive evaluation process in conjunction with EMMS' administrative team, helping buildings develop and refine their indicators of success, responding to the demands of the*

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> *statewide evaluation, and gathering data on selected building-level indicators of success. Documenting and evaluating a school's attempt to change is necessary, but may not be as useful as hoped. No single evaluation process can fully address the change dynamic envisioned in Venture Capital. . . . Accordingly, we have implemented various procedures to attempt to evaluate, fairly and constructively, the changes occurring in each East Muskingum school.* (Fuller, Morrow, & Van Voorhis, 1996, p. 2)

Now, two and one-half years later, I can more fully appreciate the statement first made by Dr. Fuller: "We know that things easily measured may not be important, whereas things that are important may not be easily measured." In addition to the statewide Venture Capital evaluation protocol and the Transforming Learning Communities research conducted during this fifth year of the initiative, EMMS has undergone — or, should I say, endured — a whole series of evaluation activities with our team. However, these activities were ones they helped to design. We did not impose any of the measures on the faculty, but rather developed our research plan based on the questions and interests of the administrative team and district faculty. Each year, the overall evaluation plan, as well as specific research/evaluation activities, were discussed with the districtwide administrative team and usually with building-level Venture Capital steering committees, or their equivalent, before implementation.

There were several districtwide research activities conducted by the local evaluation team. These measures included having selected teachers from each building complete journal entries during years two and five of the initiative. There was also a faculty opinion survey administered during years two through five; districtwide faculty, student, and parent surveys; and audiotaped focus-group interviews of parents, teachers, and students in each building. Additional year-four activities included classroom observations in each building, teacher-collected videotaped highlights of Venture activities, and the compilation of all student standardized testing and demographic data as recorded on the Ohio Educational Management Informational System (EMIS) and in archival records.

EMMS also chose to complete other evaluation activities. During year two, the middle school faculty and I selected 12 fifth-grade students who were representative of the various middle school subgroups to be studied through the completion of their eighth-grade year. They were interviewed at the end of each of their four years of middle school attendance regarding their perceptions of the middle school. Their performance at EMMS — as measured by standardized testing data, attendance patterns, and other means — was also analyzed.

Another measure developed in conjunction with the Venture Capital Steering Committee was a teacher instructional-alternative checklist used during years three and four to document not only the use of varied instructional methods, but also the use of alternative assessments, problem-solving activities, interdisciplinary units, attendance at conferences, and student use of agenda books.

Even though the checklist was actually a part of the external Venture Capital evaluation process implemented during the 1995-96 school year, teachers' conversations about its use and value, as well as the discussions surrounding active and passive learning, highlighted the ways in which they informally questioned their teaching.

> *Although I hated the checklist . . . it made me look. And, sometimes when I filled it out, it made me feel guilty . . . because, as a teacher who taught a lot of years, [I needed to] get out of my rut and try other things.* – A teacher

Likewise, teachers decided to investigate the amount of active learning that was going on in their classrooms during the third year of the Venture Capital initiative. There was some level of agreement that they needed to "find alternatives to the passive classroom, that is, an active classroom" and that it would be helpful to determine just how much active learning was occurring. However, there was not agreement "about what is passive and what is active"; this disagreement resulted in several lively discussions as to what constitutes active learning. Later, Doug reported on the value of the brief observations he systematically completed to identify instances of active learning.

> *. . . The discussions and observations caused us to look at how we do what we do in our classrooms, and how long our kids are in their seats listening — just listening to us, or watching the TV, or whatever . . . . People got defensive about those issues, but I know at the same time they were internalizing the notion of active learning because of what we are now seeing as we tour the building.* – Doug Winner, Principal

During year five, the steering committee decided to use another faculty survey based on the School Improvement Inventory developed by the Ohio Department of Education (1996) and modified for East Muskingum Schools by Dr. Van Voorhis. This survey enabled the faculty to consider their improvement efforts with respect to teaching and learning, assessment, governance, organization, and professional development. They answered the questions with respect to their own progress as individual teachers, what they perceived to be building progress, and how far along the continuous-improvement continuum they felt EMMS should ultimately go.

As a culminating activity toward the end of year five, and at the request of the principal, I conducted a session designed to reflect on the value of the Venture Capital initiative and give the new post-project steering committee some direction for the 1998-99 school year. In prearranged small groups and then during debriefing of the entire faculty, teachers addressed such questions as, "Are we better as a result of Venture?" "Where didn't we move at all?" "Has the focus-group concept worked?" EMMS was unique in involving me as the external evaluator in this discussion. In the four other buildings, these questions were asked by the building principal rather than by evaluation-team researchers. This activity served not only to provide closure on the team's research activities, but also to provide a segue into the continuous improvement planning that would begin during the next school year.

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Placing EMMS under a microscope — being watched, questioned, and challenged in this way — put a burden on many EMMS teachers far beyond any previous demands they had experienced. The building was physically bursting at the seams with more students than the building design allowed. Teachers were instructionally stretched to somehow enable more students to succeed on state-mandated proficiency tests — receiving new fifth graders who have not yet passed the proficiency tests, preparing anxious eighth graders for the ninth-grade proficiency test, and then adding a sixth-grade test in the middle! Teachers were also emotionally tense as the middle years across the nation became more fraught with early violence, pregnancy, and drug and alcohol use; and as students across across the district shared more stories of loneliness, fear, parental negligence, and parental abuse. As if that weren't enough, in the midst of increased accountability, increased numbers of students, and increased demands, teachers were asked to conduct two additional energy-intensive and somewhat threatening activities that most had neither planned nor been prepared to do: to reflect upon and critically analyze their own teaching and its impact on student learning and collect data to use as the basis for decision making. But, to the credit of a staff that really wants to do what's best for kids, most made a concerted effort to seriously engage in such reflection and analysis. However, the road was bumpy, as I reveal in the following travelogue:

> *We thought we had the right map. Oh, the early assumptions we made. We had started the school reform journey when the doors to the middle school opened, and had continued the journey with some teaming, an open environment, the schoolwide interdisciplinary unit mentioned above, et cetera. As an ex-officio member of the Venture Capital Steering Committee, I sat in on most of their initial meetings spring, summer, and fall, 1994. We thought the approved grant application was the road map we were to use as we continued on our journey; the yearly foci were the main highways we would travel; and the indicators were the destination. However, early in year two (1994-95), Ohio Department of Education directives and feedback from the state evaluation team focused on the need to have clearer, more measurable indicators of success. So we revised and revised those indicators, first making them easier to measure and then narrowing them down to the few most important ones. Our destination seemed to change as our indicators were revised. Research activities designed to measure certain indicators — e.g., an increase in the use of variety of instructional alternatives — were set aside when it became obvious that the bottom-line data source for what was happening in the classroom was increased scores and/or percentage of students passing the Ohio Proficiency Tests.*
>
> *Originally we thought that Venture Capital was to support innovation designed to promote student success in a local and state environment that was developed to minimize risk or negative consequences for new and different; it was OK to try something different,*

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fail before succeeding, experiment, et cetera. But now we realized that there were bottom lines and that the statewide evaluation protocol had very specific indicators to measure our success as Venture Capital buildings. The initial excitement of having the time and funds to attend professional conferences, visit other middle schools, take graduate classes both sited and designed specifically to meet EMMS needs and professional-development goals, et cetera, was tempered by wondering what new detour would emerge next on the Venture Capital road map.

Sometimes the map was buried under the mound of paperwork associated with the grant evaluation processes. Another common concern of the steering committee, as well as of the district administrative team, was the amount of paperwork that the statewide evaluation process required. The district had made an early conscious decision to systematically evaluate its five initiatives using specific measures agreed to by the administrative team and steering committees. Subsequently, an external statewide evaluation system was put in place with teacher and parent surveys, on-site visits, and tight timelines. Coupled with local evaluation measures, documentation of use of funds, and activity records, many teachers seemed overwhelmed with the paperwork. "The administrative tasks which are a part of the grant, as well as tasks which come from guidance and the office, often take up a great deal of our [team] planning time."

An investigative journey we thought we began with clear directions and a destination in sight became more complicated as the state mandates for logging our journey increased and as encouragement towards innovation appeared to be replaced with a narrow emphasis on improving proficiency tests scores. But EMMS did not cancel the trip as the directions changed. Faculty continued to document their work in a myriad of ways which made our travels with them as the local evaluation team a much more positive experience.

Inquiry as Professional Development

In addition to its value as an essential tool for school improvement, inquiry serves an important function in the professional development of teachers. Another critical part of the change story at EMMS has been the evolution that has taken place in teachers' views of the nature of professional development and in the opportunities available for teachers to further their own professional growth. This evolution is captured in Kaye Martin's description of professional-development activities and their impact on EMMS over the past five years.

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Kaye's Story

When I came to Muskingum College in the late October 1994 as an assistant professor in the education department, East Muskingum Middle School was beginning the second year of its Venture Capital Grant implementation. Because middle school restructuring and curriculum development have been areas of expertise and interest for me, I greeted with excitement the invitation to serve as a consultant who might help facilitate grant implementation. I was very curious about the changes that were occurring at the school nearest to the college. At that time, I had recently completed my doctoral dissertation, a year-long case study of a middle school teaching team's innovative work as they planned and implemented an integrated curriculum. I had immersed myself in the literature of middle school restructuring and was full of enthusiasm about the exciting possibilities. I was very excited to have the opportunity to be closely involved with a major school-improvement effort. I hoped that this would be the beginning of a longer collaboration that would enable me to be closely involved with middle school teachers and kids and to connect school classrooms with Muskingum's preservice teacher-education program.

Beginning that fall and continuing throughout the third and fourth years of grant implementation, I worked with the staff at East Muskingum Middle School as they planned and carried out grant-related activities. My role was an evolving one that was never clearly defined. In fact, determining the type of consultant participation that would be most helpful was, and has continued to be, a question for me as a newcomer throughout my work with the school staff. There were several areas in which the principal requested my help. I attended steering-committee meetings and faculty retreats, occasionally conducted the faculty professional-development sessions, and served as college instructor of record for the Conversation Series graduate classes offered by Muskingum College. I also consulted informally with the principal and secured resources as needed.

My first opportunity to meet the middle school faculty was in late October at an inservice workshop intended to establish the directions for the year's grant activities. Prior to the workshop, I met with district administrators to plan this, the first grant activity of the school year. I was told that the goal of the meeting was primarily to facilitate a dialogue among the teachers. The district superintendent, Dr. James Mahoney, stressed that the teachers needed "to do most of the work." Through communication within and among teams, they could develop a vision, a statement of what we stand for against which future activities and changes can be measured. Summarizing what he hoped the meeting would accomplish, Doug, the principal, said he wanted teachers to gain a clear understanding of the Venture Capital project. By this he meant not just knowledge of the language of the grant, but what the stated goals for each year, e.g., teaming, curriculum design, meant for them in their building. He also wanted the teachers to identify focus topics for the year's grant activities. The meeting was planned accordingly, with time allotted for developing a vision statement, generating topics for study, and prioritizing those topics.

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The teachers' responses to the planned agenda demonstrated a clear divergence between our administrative and academic perspectives and the knowledge and concerns of the teachers. There was an obvious impatience with spending time discussing such abstract things as visions and an unwillingness to revisit concerns with teaming. As one teacher put it, "We don't need to work on collaboration. We need to know how to spend the money." Consistent with this concern, there was a high level of participation in the process of generating and prioritizing topics of interest and concern and discussing ways of exploring these topics. However, once again it became evident that teachers were approaching this from perspectives very different from my own. My ideas for possible topics of study were drawn from the recent literature of middle school restructuring, e.g., interdisciplinary curriculum, advisor/advisee programs, and authentic assessment. Teachers suggested these topics, but also others which were of immediate concern to them, without reference to how they related to current recommendations for teaching early adolescents.

The inservice meeting itself was a reality check for me, and I was reminded that real school contexts do not necessarily reflect the neat paradigms generated by academic models of school change. I should have remembered that during my own years of classroom teaching experience, my concerns were situation-specific and pragmatic. But I still brought with me my preconceived framework of effective middle schools, and I was faced with a dilemma. How could I reconcile my belief in the legitimacy of teachers' knowledge and concerns with my goal of facilitating school change in the direction of current middle school research? This was a dilemma that has persisted to some degree throughout my experience with the middle school.

Shortly after the initial inservice meeting, I began meeting with the principal and the steering committee to plan more specifically the year's activities. From the many suggestions of teachers, five topics had emerged as the greatest concerns to be addressed. These topics were interdisciplinary units, instruction for differing abilities, alternative assessment, addressing the affective needs of students, and questioning techniques. Once topics were identified, the discussions turned to how these areas were to be addressed. Two concerns appeared to be most evident. First, there was a need for teachers to get information about these topics and to see how other schools were approaching problems related to the focus topics. Suggestions for doing this included such things as teacher inservices, visits to other schools, and attendance at conferences. Second, both Doug and the steering committee wanted to find ways to turn the ideas and knowledge gained by these various means into real changes in the classroom.

As one way to get information to teachers, the steering committee decided to offer another series of Conversation classes focusing on the five topics identified earlier. Two earlier series of such classes had been developed and offered by the graduate program of Muskingum College in order to allow teachers to explore relevant issues and trends in education. This time I agreed to serve as the instructor of record to help plan opportunities for teachers to hear speakers, discuss topics, and

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engage in a variety of learning experiences relevant to their professional concerns. The series of nine classes was scheduled for the early spring of 1995.

As these discussions were continuing with the steering committee, Doug elaborated on his concerns in a conference with Linda and me. We were joined by Sue Swaim, a middle school consultant who had facilitated a retreat to begin the EMMS Venture Capital process. At this meeting, Doug asked where he could find good sources of information and training for the staff, and he also reiterated his larger concern with translating teachers' staff-development experiences into longer-term improvement in teaching and learning. His biggest worry was that even after teachers had learned about new practices and heard the rationales for them, some of the staff would be likely to resist any innovation. He asked, "How can we bring them along?" As an example he cited the school's previous experience with introducing an advisor-advisee program. He said it had not been accepted by the staff, even though he believed from the literature that it was an important part of a successful middle school. Linda suggested that the resistance to an advisor-advisee program was due to its implementation before the staff really understood the many ways to approach the concept. "The terminology was there, but it was still not well understood." We all agreed that because the staff was at many different places on the continuum in their understanding of the middle school philosophy, it would be most effective to build on the early successes with teaming and try to bring other elements of improvement along gradually as teachers gained more knowledge. The motivation, as Sue expressed it, would not be to devalue what the staff was already doing, but to learn how to meet changing needs — "to make a good place even better."

The diversity of the staff in terms of philosophy and orientation toward change was apparent from the beginning of my experience with them; it was evident in the first steering-committee meetings I attended. Although most of the committee members were committed to the goals of the grant, they were very concerned about how the grant activities would be accepted by the larger school staff, and they were also quite sensitive to how the staff might perceive them as leaders in the change efforts. This attitude proved to be justified, as differences of opinion emerged even among members of the committee. For example, when the subject of students' affective needs came up as a focus for one of the Conversation Series seminars, there was an obvious disagreement about the worth and relevance of the topic. More than one of the those present believed that meeting affective needs was not part of their responsibilities as teachers. When one teacher referred to nurturing, another teacher replied, "That's not what we're here to do.... We don't do much nurturing."

Another theme that was apparent early in my work with EMMS was the tendency to address most staff-development needs through bringing in an outside expert. Even though Venture Capital money made it possible for teachers to attend many conferences, to make visits to other school sites, and to attend classes, they did not generally rely on each other as valid sources of knowledge. As we

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planned the spring 1995 Conversation Series, I suggested that teachers take turns sharing the knowledge they brought back from conferences and site visits. Teachers listened politely, but it was clear that they believed this would be seen as claims of expertise that they were uncomfortable assuming. References were made to past occasions when peer sharing had resulted in the perception that some teachers thought they were doing a better job than others. Discussion immediately returned to how guest speakers might best be scheduled, and the Conversation Series was selected as the best means to do this. It was left to Doug and to me to choose the experts who would be invited to visit. The classes that spring were therefore limited to my presentations and those of outside speakers on selected topics.

The third year of the grant (1995-96) was intended to focus on the development of instructional strategies. The opening activity was, again, a teacher inservice provided for by an early dismissal of students. I was the invited presenter for the afternoon. Mindful that teachers had responded best to speakers who involved them in activities they saw as immediately applicable to their own teaching, I presented several specific teaching strategies after a brief introduction to provide context.

When I met with Doug a day or two after the meeting, he stressed that the group still was interested in focusing on instructional strategies in the new series of Conversation classes beginning later in the fall. He added that teachers did not want the class speakers to be college professors; instead, they preferred public school teachers who were "highly motivated, good presenters who actually have taken kids where they are and been successful in individualizing instruction." We decided to locate teachers who had experience in using and presenting strategies of interest to the staff.

Again the question arose about how to carry staff-development activities beyond the small group enrolled in the class and engage the larger staff of the school, and I asked Doug how he would like for me to be involved. At this point, it seemed important to me to address the yet-undefined expectations of how the school wanted me to contribute to their staff development and how they would use my expertise in their school-improvement efforts. I believed that, as a guest in the school and as a newcomer in the school community, I should not prescribe what kinds of improvement were needed, but I should, instead, offer the kinds of help that teachers had determined was needed. This seemed to pose a dilemma, because one of the continuing problems was that there was no consensus among the staff about what needed to improve. Therefore, I suggested that I might begin working with teachers informally in several different ways as interests or needs dictated.

In describing the kinds of help I might offer as a consultant, I included assistance and feedback for teacher planning, both individually and with teams; serving in the role of a critical friend; demonstration teaching or co-teaching with EMMS staff; providing brief, focused demonstrations or workshops that would be followed by classroom experimentation; and helping with teaching resources. I explained the kinds of things I believed could lead to long-term growth versus the kinds of short, flashy presentations that may or may not lead to teacher implementation. Just as their students

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needed to be engaged actively in learning, it seemed to me that teachers themselves needed to become engaged in active inquiry, classroom experimentation, and reflection on practice. I made these kinds of suggestions several times during my work with the EMMS staff, but my contributions continued to be more limited than I wished. Although I worked more closely with some individuals and small groups, I was never able to work with teachers in their classrooms.

One attitude which appeared to contribute to teachers' reluctance to allow me to work more closely with them was the idea that professional development in general, and the Venture Capital project in particular, was intended to fix something that was wrong with their teaching. There was a degree of defensiveness among some teachers, even among those on the steering committee, whenever changes were suggested. EMMS had been using teaming and interdisciplinary units for some time, but in some other areas there was not always a high level of awareness of current middle school literature or of what other schools were doing. When some teachers suggested that changes be made, others saw no need to question traditional practices and showed little knowledge of alternative possibilities. Doug and I discussed many times how the school could continue to move toward further change when many staff members saw no reason to do so. However, a dedicated core of teachers were committed to continuous improvement, and the decision was made to move ahead with this core, hoping that others would come along.

It seemed to me also that, to some degree, the culture of the school prevented more extensive use of my help until I had worked with the staff long enough for them to know me well. Gradually I began to feel I was developing a relationship of trust and collegiality that was reflected in easy and comfortable interactions at meetings and classes. An illustration of this was the reaction of teachers when I automatically began to jot down notes at the first steering-committee meeting I attended. Several teachers appeared to be so uncomfortable with this and so preoccupied with what I might be writing that I put away my notebook and, after that, waited until after the meetings to reconstruct what had happened. However, by the third year of my work with them, I was able to take occasional notes without causing any attention or unease. By this time, the teachers and I knew each other better. I had come to respect their dedication and professional skills, and they, I hope, had gained a level of trust in me.

This third year of the grant represented, I believe, a critical turning point in the professional growth of the EMMS staff. First, a state evaluator visited the school in November and summarized his observations to the steering committee. He noted evidence that teams were accepting responsibility for addressing a variety of student needs. Also, increased teaming had created more open dialogue, more collaborative teacher planning, and more use of interdisciplinary units. However, he expressed concern about the lack of teacher consensus and the need to focus change efforts on fundamental issues instead of pursuing individual interests.

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The evaluator's visit appeared to lower the morale of the committee, which interpreted the comments as criticism of their efforts. However, a few months later, focus interviews with teachers identified some successes and generated new confidence. Teachers perceived that the Venture Capital Grant had provided them with more resources, opportunities, and enthusiasm for professional development than they had had before. They also recognized that many teachers were, in fact, trying new strategies and that these were making a difference. They responded to the evaluator's call for more focus in grant activities as they discovered a common concern with improving students' reading across the curriculum and formed a small group to explore the issue.

Several important events during this third year can help to illustrate significant growth in the way the teachers were beginning to take charge of their own professional development. First, the teachers who were exploring reading across the curriculum accepted my offer to meet with them as a study group, and I shared with them some specific strategies for helping students read in the content areas. These strategies were received enthusiastically by the teachers, and several reported later to me that they had used the strategies successfully in their classrooms.

One of these strategies, the Guided Reading and Summary Procedure (GRASP), had a more far-reaching effect than I could ever have predicted. One of the teachers was so successful in implementing this with her own class that she shared it with other teachers in a presentation at a professional conference. The next fall I received more evidence of the influence of the original study group when a student teacher reported to me that her cooperating teacher was using a very effective strategy. The strategy, of course, turned out to be GRASP, and the teacher was at EMMS. The teacher who had made the presentation had also shared the strategy with another teacher, who shared it with the student teacher.

Another event of that year provided evidence of dramatic progress in terms of moving toward teacher-led staff development. A schoolwide staff meeting near the end of the school year was devoted to the topic of instructional strategies. Eight teachers, working in pairs, demonstrated to their peers the instructional strategies they had been experimenting within their own classrooms. All staff members rotated among the pairs sharing until everyone had experienced all of the strategies. The response from teachers was, on the whole, quite positive, and it seemed that this experience might help to alleviate some of the discomfort this staff traditionally has had with negative perceptions of individual claims of expertise.

The fourth year began with a faculty retreat. A report from the evaluation team provided an opportunity for a member check to be conducted on all the data sources associated with Venture Capital Grant research activities. Teachers believed that the summary accurately reflected their experiences. They agreed that the understanding of Venture Capital goals was growing among teachers. They also

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shared their ongoing concerns about teachers' fear of sharing their developing expertise. With only two grant years' funding remaining, there was also concern expressed about how growth would continue "when the money runs out."

The fourth-year Conversation Series was developed with the goal of responding to the state evaluation team's recommendation that the classes should shift from bringing in speakers to present on topics of interest to engaging teachers actively in addressing fundamental issues. The class this year, therefore, was fundamentally different in structure from those of the preceding years. Several focus topics were identified for study, and teachers assumed responsibility for leading whole-class discussions on these topics. There were two types of class formats which were used alternately. The first format was devoted to gathering information. Teachers met in the Muskingum College Library and in one of the college's computer laboratories, where they researched the current topic of interest. The information-gathering was then followed by a class that followed the sharing/discussion format. Teachers shared what they had learned and discussed the implications of this knowledge for their school. These two class formats seemed to work very well to promote teachers' acquisition of new information, personalization and application of this knowledge, and the development of a level of comfort using computer technology, another goal of the grant.

Another important difference in this most recent Conversation Series was that it was extended beyond the faculty of EMMS and opened to other staff members in the district's schools, all of which were Venture Capital schools. This was an important step in connecting teachers' professional development to students' learning, because teachers were able to share what they were doing and begin to better articulate learning across grade levels.

These various positive developments during the fourth year could have far-reaching implications for future professional development and school improvement at EMMS. It was hoped that the conversations this year would serve as the basis for topics to be pursued in the fifth grant year and would enable teachers to develop pilot projects for implementation, for gathering resources, and for collecting data on teaching effectiveness.

The school-improvement initiative has changed the nature of professional development in East Muskingum Middle School. Prior to grant funding, professional development opportunities were rare, funds were limited, and professional travel was not encouraged. Sharing of instructional expertise was seen as threatening by many teachers. Initially teachers thought staff development meant that experts came from outside the school to demonstrate and model innovative practices.

Attendance at professional conferences is now the norm, and a learning wall in the teacher conference room now documents the wide variety of teachers' professional-growth activities. This learning wall was covered with charts on which teachers individually noted their own professional-devel-

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opment experiences, such as conferences or workshops attended, books read, or school sites visited. Now teachers are beginning to take charge of their own growth, to reflect on their knowledge, and to consider how professional-development opportunities relate to the context of their own teaching. During the first three grant years, teachers seemed to be casting about for new ideas in rather a random fashion, but as the fourth year began, there was evidence that they were establishing a more clear focus for professional growth. They have now learned enough about new strategies and middle school trends to expand their notions of what is possible.

An exciting development has been the slow increase in building norms of collegiality and sharing. A precedent was set for teachers presenting to others in the building and even for sharing at conferences. There is still much resistance and fear attached to this, but teachers' comments reveal increasing acceptance of the notion that they do have expertise to share. There is now a core of teachers that believes that such sharing is beneficial, and it is continuing on an informal level. This signals an important change toward teachers serving as resources for each other's professional development.

A similar shift has also begun to take place in the teachers' assumption of responsibility for students' learning. This was evidenced by their identification of needs specific to their students, their recognition that these needs were not all being met, and their desire to learn about strategies to teach students more effectively. For example, the staff has worked on curriculum-mapping activities together, and teams have worked together to adjust schedules to allow for more in-depth study of topics and interdisciplinary units. The grant activities which emphasized instructional strategies have resulted in more use of a variety of teaching strategies by a number of teachers. Use of technology has also increased as teachers have gained more knowledge and a greater level of comfort with computers and the use of the Internet.

A major pattern that became apparent from a careful examination of all the research data was a fundamental change in teachers' dispositions toward the kinds of staff development that accompany school restructuring efforts. The teachers' initial view of staff development as a tacit acknowledgment that something was wrong with their teaching had created a defensive stance among some faculty. By the end of the third grant year, this attitude was changing noticeably, and the change was documented by data from such diverse sources as teacher journals, focus groups, and observations of committee meetings and the Conversation Series.

There is much evidence of an emerging concept of staff development at EMMS as a long-term process that is teacher-driven, teacher-constructed, and teacher-evaluated. One teacher said, "It's going to be a long time down the road before we see results"; but, in fact, much has already been accomplished. This staff believes it is going in the right direction, and has developed confidence and knowledge that should help them to continue their journey.

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The Challenge

Inquiry at EMMS includes internally and externally induced examination of practice and professional learning. The more formal inquiry that responds to external requirements exists in a kind of dynamic tension with the more natural kinds of inquiry that have always been part of the culture of the school. Sometimes the more systematic formalized inquiry, which requires explicit criteria and indicators of success, may be perceived as a barrier to the kinds of informal inquiry in the corridors that have always been aimed at continuous improvement.

Prior to the Venture Capital initiative, if you had asked how inquiry is conducted at EMMS or across the district, there would have been hesitation: the term inquiry was not commonly used. If teachers were asked whether they examined their practice and asked critical questions, their answer would be, "of course, we always do." Again, informal self-evaluation was second nature to the district. Unfortunately, post-Venture Capital, the same question might result in a similar hesitation, but for a very different reason. Now, what might come to mind are such things as piles of paperwork, checklists, and surveys, the practical use of which is questioned.

Neither response is indicative of the role of inquiry in the building or the challenges faced when trying to conduct critical analysis. Throughout the history of the school, the standard question asked about all practices has been, "What's best for kids?" Consistently raising this question has resulted in implementing new practices and revisiting old ones. However, one question which has not always been considered is, "What criteria are you using to determine what is best for kids?" On the other hand, teams have said that they have made a change because something was not working. What is meant by not working? Against what standards are decisions about changes assessed?

When the EMMS staff members of the Transforming Learning Communities research evaluation team were asked what kinds of standards are appropriate for justifying decisions related to curriculum, instruction, school governance, and professional development, they responded that, "it's always a trade-off." For example, if class size is currently the chief concern, then the criterion becomes one of reducing class size. This may be contrary to other recommended practices, such as the use of large blocks of flexible time for instruction, which had previously been a major concern.

A related question is the degree to which teams are empowered to make their own decisions. How far does empowerment go? Do teams have to provide a convincing rationale for their decisions? Is teacher preference enough? Has there been enough in-depth investigation of the issue or practice to make an informed decision? What is the likelihood that the newly adopted practice will be any better than the last one? Without a doubt, such inquiry is difficult to conduct, given the constraints of teaching demands and the difficulty in locating valuable and relevant information sources. The challenge for EMMS, as for many schools, is to extend the informal inquiry that is a natural part of their practice to a more critical and reflective level.

Inquiry often leads to recognition of needs for change. This is true of both the natural and collaborative inquiry that occurs at EMMS and the more formal systematic inquiry that is carried out in response to external demands. Chapter Four will explore some of the factors which help to determine the degree to which innovations are integrated into the overall climate and culture of the school.

Chapter Four

Integration

The collaborative culture that exists in the East Muskingum Middle School (EMMS) community fosters a school climate that increasingly encourages professional inquiry. This inquiry sometimes leads to changes in norms, beliefs, and practices, some of which appear briefly and then disappear. Other changes may continue, but these may be limited to individuals or small groups scattered throughout the school. However, some changes persist and become integrated into the life of the school. At EMMS, several forces have served to institutionalize the change process and to integrate people and practices within the school. This chapter will explore examples of these various integration options.

Innovation: Embraced or Ignored?

The most recent focus of change which is actually being integrated throughout the school is the use of Internet technology. An intention to explore this topic was actually incorporated into the statement of beliefs that was developed as part of the Venture Capital Grant. Some classes in the Conversation Series in the third grant year had provided opportunities for a few teachers to use the computer laboratories at Muskingum College to surf the World Wide Web and to discover sites that were of interest to themselves and their students. However, few teachers had computers at home, and the school building was not yet wired for Internet accessibility, so technology use remained outside the curriculum for all practical purposes. This changed in the spring of the case study year. At this time, the wiring was complete, student and teacher access to the Internet became a possibility, and suddenly there was immediate interest in professional-development opportunities to provide teachers with technological expertise and knowledge of curricular applications.

In response to the need for training, a presenter was brought in to demonstrate classroom use of Internet technology. This inservice presentation, provided by a professor from Ohio University, was seen by teachers as great success and was frequently mentioned as an important example of the benefits the Venture Capital Grant had provided. The day was widely regarded as a turning point in teachers' attitudes toward the use of computer technology. This appeared to be a result of teachers' growing comfort with their own computer literacy and an increase in knowledge of how Internet use could enhance the curriculum. As Doug Winner put it, "Some people had to be shown that it's safe and OK.... A large group of people said, 'Oh, I can do that.'"

An additional factor that facilitated the integration of Internet into the classroom was the consideration given to parents' concerns prior to implementation. The staff at EMMS realized that its community would expect that students did not have unrestricted access to Internet sites. According to staff, a great deal of study went into getting a blocking system to shut down certain sites, and there was a spare-no-expense approach to solving this problem. Parents, the staff said, "trust us, but they'll want some communication about what we are doing." Without this communication, which assured the community that their fears were being addressed, this innovation would have likely met with the kind of protests that would have resulted in abandoning Internet use.

The adoption of a new reading program, described in Chapter Three, was an example of a response to another need that had been identified by a majority of teachers in the middle school. Even though this program has been implemented by only a few teachers, the need to improve students' reading skills continues to be a problem. This is exacerbated, moreover, by the growing need for teacher and school accountability. Increasing pressures surrounding state-mandated proficiency tests can only increase anxiety about students' performance. An awareness of the need for improving students' reading skills so that they can pass these tests is likely to result in further experimentation and change, even if the particular program now in use is not ultimately viewed as the best solution to the problem. Thus, an inquiry which has resulted in change will probably continue to promote future innovation.

The initiation of changes in reading instruction and the steps that have been taken toward integration of technology can be contrasted with the stories of other innovations that have been introduced at EMMS. One such story involved attempts to promote the study and use of alternative assessment. This had been a topic that originally had been identified for study at the beginning of the second year of Venture Capital, and there were several efforts to provide teachers with knowledge of nontraditional assessment. At least two different classes in the Conversation Series were devoted to presentations on the subject. Although the presentations were well received, Doug reported that "not much of that ever went anywhere."

This raised the question of why some innovations were readily adopted by the staff at EMMS, while others were introduced and died without capturing teachers' interest. Doug believed that it depended on "whether teachers saw it as relevant and as something they could use." Several factors seemed to contribute to teachers' interest in an innovation. These included links to Venture Capital goals and state mandates and initiatives, awareness of parent interests and concerns, availability of resources, and access to training or expertise that was credible, supportive, and appropriate to their assessment of current needs.

In the case of technology use, several of these factors were present. The state of Ohio was encouraging all schools to make use of computer technology and was providing funds for installing computers, wiring buildings for Internet access, and providing computer training through SchoolNet, a statewide agency for the provision and integration of technology into preschool-to-grade-twelve public schools.

This was an initiative which also generated parent enthusiasm, along with concerns about students' unlimited access. Most teachers agreed that computer literacy was important and acknowledged a need for assistance in using new technologies. Finally, expertise was available just as Internet linkage became a possibility for the school and teachers had an immediate use for the skills. Teachers had a safe introduction through both the comfortable setting of the Conversation Classes and the arrival of a credible consultant who could demonstrate technology use in a teacher-friendly way.

Similarly, in the case of the adoption of the new reading program, teachers had a strong motivation to address the problem of low reading scores on Ohio's mandated proficiency tests. In addition, students' reading deficiencies caused a problem that affected teachers in every content area. The SLD teachers were able to serve as credible sources of information, and as these teachers became more involved in the regular classrooms, they were consulted more often about student needs. Therefore, when they suggested exploring a new reading program, the rest of the staff was receptive to their ideas. The fact that the program was readily available and addressed their needs without a big investment in training and materials further contributed to teachers' positive reactions.

Reading was a problem area they were already discussing, so the Conversation Series offered an opportunity to explore a need they recognized. This contrasted with their responses to the staff-development sessions that had been provided in the area of assessment. Evidently, many teachers did not see assessment as a critical problem for them in their classrooms, so they saw no reason to invest time and effort into trying and adopting new assessment strategies. This may help to explain why change was implemented in the area of reading, but not in the area of assessment. Even though assessment had originally been one of the key areas the Venture Capital Grant application had noted as a need for exploration, not enough teachers felt the need to embark on such a journey to make it worth the trip.

Innovation: Embraced by a Few

Cooperative learning was another of the areas identified for study early in the Venture Capital process. Prior to this, a countywide professional-development consortium had provided training on this topic. During the period of the Venture Capital Grant, many professional-development events focused on this topic, and additional information was gained by individual teachers through other avenues such as workshops and classes, conference attendance, and school visits. At the time of the study, visits to classrooms at EMMS revealed that several teachers were using various cooperative-learning strategies with their students. However, use of cooperative learning was never pursued as a schoolwide goal.

Implementation of cooperative learning at EMMS has been characterized by wide variability in terms of how frequently teachers use these strategies. There is also a wide range of skills in using specific strategies and in the understanding of what factors are essential in making cooperative activities successful. For example, cooperative-learning activities observed in a physical education class featured all

students completing challenging activities among eight stations in order to earn a team score. Every activity had team building and cooperation goals. In contrast, in other classes, what the teacher described as cooperative learning was simply working in groups without team goals.

Teachers' variable understanding of how to carry out cooperative-learning activities was also reflected in a tendency to structure group work in a way that did not provide for individual student accountability for completing learning tasks. This was a problem that really did hamper the integration of cooperative learning into the larger curriculum of the school. In fact, teachers said that the practice was derailed to some extent because of parental complaints such as, "My kid's doing all the work" and "My kid's grade is getting dragged down because of those other kids in his group." In response to this, some teachers continued to experiment and adapt the ways in which they structured cooperative-learning activities. Others abandoned their attempts and returned to whole-class or individual strategies.

A factor which has inhibited the ability of teachers to gain more knowledge and expertise in using cooperative learning strategies has been the infrequency of instructional collaboration among teachers across grade levels and teams. Although there are many collaborative arrangements for school governance, few structures exist outside of the Conversation Series and periodic buildingwide staff meetings to facilitate teachers' sharing of ideas outside their teams. One researcher's observations provide insight into what might be gained through such sharing opportunities. Two lessons were observed in two different subject areas at two different grade levels.

> *[In the first class] a teacher had students working in pairs to construct concept maps and relationships between those concepts in pictures and in words. On the day I observed, the teacher was circulating from pair to pair asking each member of each team probing questions to elicit their explanations of their concept webs. In the second, a teacher gave students about 20 minutes to scan some resource books on a topic and to construct mind maps of interesting facts about the topic. One representative from each group held up their mind maps and named facts on the maps at the end of the lesson.* – Case study researcher

There is no indication that either of these two teachers was aware that a colleague was utilizing somewhat similar webbing strategies. In terms of professional learning, each might have benefited from talking with the other to find out what worked or didn't work and from sharing ideas that might have helped the other to improve his/her use of the strategy. At this time, although teachers explore teaching strategies and discuss ideas in the context of Conversation classes and other professional development events, this kind of dialogue has not yet become a routine occurrence in the corridors.

In contrast to reading instruction and technology use, which were areas of identified need for most of the EMMS faculty, there appeared to be fewer compelling reasons for the staff as a whole to focus attention on the development of cooperative-learning strategies. Whereas state mandates focused on technology education and reading proficiency, no such mandates existed to highlight the use of cooper-

ative-learning strategies. There was no sense among the staff that the use of such strategies met any urgent needs in the classrooms. Quite the contrary, in fact. The parental complaints which have been mentioned tended to support the perception that cooperative learning did not facilitate student achievement. In fact, the physical education teachers liked to use cooperative learning because of the team building and social skills, not just because of the improved academic learning benefits.

The factors which contributed to the success of other innovations were not present in the case of cooperative learning. It seems that because teachers' understanding and skill in using cooperative-learning strategies did not always lead to recognizable benefits in terms of student achievement, and because their perceptions were echoed by parents, many teachers decided against further experimentation. Others, seeing the potential for benefits, either cognitive or affective, continued to develop their repertoires of cooperative strategies.

Innovation: Adopted and Adapted

Interdisciplinary units have a history of use at EMMS. In fact, at least two units — the Olympics and the Washington, DC, units — have become institutionalized and used on a cyclical basis, although they continue to be modified and refined every time they are taught. As stated earlier, there was a long-standing expectation that each team would develop and teach interdisciplinary units, but some teams have been more enthusiastic about this than others. Some units that were described in Venture Capital teacher journals include an arts team unit, which was intended to encourage healthy use of leisure time; a seventh-grade unit called Prove It!, which was organized around a simulated investigation of a supposed theft of a cookie jar; and a fifth-grade Animals Unit that was taught every year.

At first glance, the repeated use year after year of units such as the Animals, the Olympics, and the '60s might suggest that interest in development of interdisciplinary units had waned, but this is not true. Teachers are continuing to revise and adapt these units to reflect changes in curriculum outcomes and the increasing complexity of their understanding of curriculum integration. The Animals unit provides a good example of this. This unit, which used content area skills as tools to study the designated topic, required students to research an animal — gather information about its appearance, habitat, behavior, and relationship to man. The unit culminated with the development of a research paper and a trip to the zoo. However, during one of the Conversation Series seminars, the fifth-grade team revised the unit to extend beyond individual research to include two weeks in the content areas, with students learning more about animals using map skills as they identified the animals' habitats and climates and mathematics to organize data and make comparisons, and learning writing skills needed to complete their papers.

This evidence of increasing sophistication in terms of integrating content learning for students was accompanied by a developing understanding by teachers about the place of interdisciplinary units in the

larger curriculum. Teachers reported that interdisciplinary units had historically been viewed as discrete events unrelated to day-to-day content-area instruction. As one teacher said, "Time out! We're going to do an interdisciplinary unit."

As time passes, it is becoming understood that interdisciplinary units need to be integrated into the total curriculum and that they should be incorporating essential curriculum outcomes, rather than forcing instructional content to fit a theme. According to one teacher's journal, there was "a realization that we did not need to look any further for such units to happen, but that we just needed to look within what we are already doing and restructure . . . think big, but start small."

Continued institutionalization of the use of interdisciplinary units will probably be influenced by several factors. It will be facilitated by teachers' increased understanding of the rationale for curriculum integration and by their growing repertoire of interdisciplinary units. The school's commitment to shared team planning times is a structure that will also greatly facilitate the development of such units. However, changing policies are now requiring schools to be held accountable in ways that range from proficiency tests to district report cards. Teachers' conversations suggest that these policies may threaten progress toward curriculum integration and serve to direct a move back toward specific subject instruction in order to raise test scores.

In today's climate of educational reform, there is often an assumption that educational improvement consists of immediately observable, often dramatic change events. The notion of continuous improvement, however, would suggest that educational change can be just as valuable when it occurs through a process of refinement and development of existing practices and expertise. The story of the use of interdisciplinary units strategies at EMMS illustrates the process by which practices adopted earlier continue to be revisited, adapted, and improved upon to meet current needs and to reflect more recent understandings of those practices.

Integration for Developmental Needs

The external demand for subject-based accountability for student learning is not the only factor creating a pull away from curriculum integration and a return to departmentalization of instruction. Both principal and teachers have reported a difference of philosophy that exists in the school "about how we see kids." This tension appears whenever there is debate about a proposed recommendation based on the developmental needs of early adolescents. Although EMMS has been evolving as a middle school for a long time, there are still some teachers who continue to embrace a junior high school perspective, which is characterized by a greater focus on content than on the affective needs of children, by such structures as 40- to 50-minute periods devoted to separate subjects, and by teaching loads which require teachers to deal with more than 150 students each day. Thus, there are competing forces between totally implementing a middle school philosophy and returning to traditional junior high arrangements and practices.

These competing perspectives are evident in many debates that have occurred throughout the years of change at EMMS. These debates help to explain some of the back-and-forth change that has occurred in several areas. Those who view practices from a middle school perspective, for example, stress curriculum integration to promote relevance and meaning for students, while others favor the separate subject approach of the content-area specialist. The same people tend to line up on opposite sides regarding the importance of active learning versus lecture as preferred teaching strategies.

Differing beliefs about the importance of viewing practices through a developmentally appropriate lens have created what Doug Winner has described as a tension between norms of nurturing/caring and emphasis on teaching responsibility/adhering to rules. The history of attempts over the years to institute advisor-advisee programs in various forms illustrates how this tension has repeatedly blocked integration of such programs at EMMS. Both these programs and the more recently introduced intervention homerooms, Muskie Mentors, provoked disagreements among faculty about the role of affective education and the fairness of giving more help to some people than others.

Organizational Norms and Arrangements Affecting Integration

The fact that teachers at EMMS, like those at many other schools, do not always agree need not mean that change cannot take place. It just means that ways have to be found to accommodate those who wish to make changes, while taking into account the views of those who do not. At EMMS, as in the district as a whole, there is the belief that change is always ongoing, but everyone does not have to make changes in a lock-step fashion. There is a sense that change happens over the long term. The consensus often expressed is that "we don't all have to move at once." The hope is that successful innovations will be contagious. Doug described a frequent pattern of innovation. It starts with "a few people trying something . . . and then with peers asking, 'What's it like?' 'How's it going?' 'What do you think?'... and then it broadens out from there." However, even as an innovation becomes institutionalized, it is never static. "It seems when you get most of the people on board, the first group will be wanting to change again."

The structures of the school are consistent with these beliefs about the nature of change and innovation. The degree of autonomy, which has allowed teams to operate almost as four schools within a school, has enabled change to occur without the necessity for whole-school consensus. For example, as described in Chapter Two, teams have been able to respond to different assessments of priorities — students' needs to learn identified skills, teachers' needs for smaller classes, and needs of accountability for students' learning.

The organizational norms and arrangements that foster teacher autonomy in terms of initiation and compartmentalization of innovation within the teams exist in tension with external pressures for schoolwide integration brought about by the grants and by educational policies. Some innovations, such as those in reading and technology, have been endorsed as a response to state mandates. Integration of other new practices has been encouraged by the mere fact of grant implementation.

The requirements of the grant dictated that some goals had to be set, and this caused people to at least try some new practices. This tempered some teachers' initial enthusiasm for the initiative. Although all teachers "signed off on the grant application," not all realized the significance of that signature or, for that matter, the significance of getting the grant. A core of teachers remained committed to the goals of the initiative, and, over the five-year period, more and more teachers began to use a variety of instructional strategies and to incorporate technology into their classroom instruction. However, there remained a minority of teachers that "just drifted along."

Nevertheless, the pioneer and the settler phenomenon was not new at the middle school. Historically, the school was known for having a faculty that was often split when it came to making changes. It appeared that when a majority decision was honored, often after considerable debate over a proposed change, a vocal minority could change the decision. This seemed to result in the perception that "we talk and talk and talk, but what really happens?" The resistance of the minority seemed to intensify every time word was received that there was a need to revise indicators, do more paperwork, or something else considered unpleasant.

The kind of tensions EMMS has experienced during the period of grant implementation is likely to continue, as recent legislative changes in public educational policies require schools to look critically at their own practices. All districts now must engage in continuous-improvement planning, which will involve continuing inquiry and integration of change. This suggests a continuing effort to balance teacher autonomy with external demands for accountability.

Challenges

One of the greatest challenges faced by schools that are struggling to improve is always how to move forward as a school when its members are divided on needs and proposals for change. EMMS has dealt with this, at least in part, by promoting team and teacher autonomy thereby reducing the need for consensus. Teachers are usually not forced to accept innovations, because of the belief, shared by many educational researchers, that meaningful change occurs only when teachers recognize a need for the change and accept its rationale (Bussis, Chittenden, & Amarel, 1976).

However, although team autonomy has had an enabling effect on the change effort, it has also served in another way to inhibit integration of change. There is a great deal of communication within teams, but teachers frequently mentioned that they would have liked more opportunities to interact with members of other teams. The same scheduling that allows a common team planning time also means that teachers could spend the entire day interacting only with their own team members, even eat lunch together. Some teachers mentioned that a tremendous benefit of the Conversation Classes for them was the opportunity to talk and share experiences with people from other teams and grade levels.

Hargreaves (1995) has pointed to features that are characteristic of collegial school cultures. These include "practices that support mutual classroom observation and discussion of teaching and learning" (p. 42). This kind of sharing allows teachers to share both problems and successes. Such an open, constructive climate also encourages teachers to take risks by attempting new practices and by reflecting critically with others on their experiences. Communication and cooperation are highly valued at EMMS, and structures such as the Conversation Classes, the daily shared planning periods, and developing norms of peer sharing and professional development are breaking down what Fullan (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) has called the "walls of privatism." An important task may be to continue to find ways for teachers to tap into that collaborative strength to share their knowledge and instructional skills.

A second challenge will be that of building on the progress that has been made in the face of changing public attitudes and policies that define accountability in new ways and measure success by scores on standardized tests. It will be difficult to hold onto innovations that do not produce immediate results in terms of proficiency-test scores; these do not change quickly. Beliefs in integrating learning and affective goals for students may, in fact, conflict with pressures to get back to basics. Finally, evolving, ongoing change may be hard to sustain amid calls for quick fixes.

Chapter Five

Continuing the Journey

"We view continuous improvement as what we are about. We will continue to work on improving EMMS just as we had worked to improve it prior to receiving Venture Capital funds." – A teacher

The above statement captures the building's perception of East Muskingum Middle School (EMMS) as a school that has and will continue to embrace the processes of change through collaboration, inquiry, and integration, as well as the district's emphasis on continuous improvement. As noted in Chapter One, EMMS has been involved in change initiatives since it was built. However, opportunities to explore middle school practices were limited, with few, if any, funds to support participation in professional development. With the Venture Capital funds made available toward the end of the 1993-94 school year, teachers had an opportunity to deepen their knowledge about and strengthen their skills in middle-level education. The expectations for continuous improvement that are rapidly becoming the norm within the building may be more difficult to attain without the resources for such improvement.

Where Has the Road Taken Us?

Even though the five-year period of the Venture Capital initiative has come to an end, change continues at EMMS. The four focus groups identified near the end of year three and operational during year five continue, and the building and district have moved into Continuous Improvement Planning (CIP), a form of collaborative long-range planning now required in Ohio schools. The Building Steering Committee that will be driving the CIP process will use lessons learned from the Venture Capital years as key data sources for their next round of long-range planning.

EMMS teachers' strengthened reliance on informal inquiry and collaboration is revealed in their recent decision to have another Conversation Series during the 1998-99 school year. After an intense discussion about school and student needs, a dozen middle school teachers selected two topics for the course — school climate and differentiation of instruction — that had surfaced in earlier considerations of the Venture Capital Steering Committee but that had never moved to the top of the list. The emerg-

ing conception of teachers as valuable resources for each other is illustrated by two decisions they made for the upcoming seminars. They will begin each session by randomly selecting one or two real classroom problems or questions that they have described on a card and anonymously dropped into a Conversation Questions box prior to the class. The questions or problems selected will be read to the participants, and then they will spend the next 15 to 20 minutes brainstorming alternatives. A second illustration is in their decision to bring in the special-services team (composed of the four special education teachers) for two evenings — once during the sessions on school climate and once during the sessions on differentiation of instruction. To a person, they agreed that all the members of that team had much expertise to share and that they would all benefit from discussing their concerns with team members and considering the approaches they now use in meeting the behavioral and instructional challenges of individual learners.

In addition to transformations related to professional development, there have been other changes which some attribute, at least in part, to the climate and opportunities created through the Venture Capital initiative. In the closing full-faculty discussion held near the end of the fifth year of the initiative, teachers were asked whether Venture Capital had made a difference. There was a majority of teachers who felt that activities associated with Venture Capital resulted in improvement in several areas, although there seemed to be agreement with the statement made by one teacher that "maybe the money just speeded up the process . . . because we always worked to improve our schools." However, the consensus of the faculty was that there had been improvement, for whatever reasons, in the following areas:

1. increased understanding and use of technology by teachers and students
2. a greater involvement of the steering committee in building-wide decision making
3. a greater focus on professional development, which finally resulted on four target areas being established and addressed (reading, technology, parent/community involvement, and proficiency testing)
4. increased parent and community input in decision making and volunteering
5. modest movement of proficiency tests scores (Morrow, 1998)

These differences were what the faculty considered to be anticipated, since they were early grant foci and many had been built into their performance indicators.

Additionally, the EMMS faculty noted a number of unanticipated positive changes associated with the Venture Capital initiative that had emerged over the past five years. These changes included:

1. a promising approach to reading intervention
2. the value of the Conversation Series approach to professional development through a partnership with Muskingum College and building additional bridges with higher education
3. intervention home rooms for students at risk of not passing the proficiency test and with other types of difficulties
4. different scheduling options
5. more autonomy within each grade-level team
6. new materials and computer resources
7. some teachers' increased confidence in their work and skills in personal reflectivity
8. the belief and value that professional development is not a frill and must be both focused and sustained

At the same time, however, several negative perceptions of the Venture Capital process also emerged. More than one teacher voiced the concern that much discussion does not necessarily result in action. "Sometimes after talking and talking and talking, a decision needs to be made, and then we just need to do it regardless of the vocal minority." Also reported was a weariness resulting both from the paperwork associated with the various Venture Capital activities and evaluation processes and from ongoing internal and external examination of the faculty and building. And although 100% of the faculty indicated on the yearly faculty perception survey that "Venture Capital activities in our building are resulting in increased student learning," "to a great extent or more," 25% of them could not identify any one specific change in student learning "as a result of my [building] involvement in Venture Capital activities."

Perhaps of even more significance to future discussions of change at EMMS is the teachers' recognition of "where we didn't move at all" during the five-year initiative. During the final full-faculty discussion about Venture Capital, small groups of teachers were asked to identify these areas. (It is important to remember, though, that the following phrases generated in small groups do not necessarily represent the consensus of the entire faculty.)

1. teachers who misunderstood or didn't really buy into [Venture Capital] from the first to the last
2. never dealing with class size or ways to work with the large groups we have
3. learning new ideas from conferences, classes, visits, et cetera, but not really moving on them
4. our mind sets never really changing

These last comments are consistent with challenges noted in Chapter Three. Even though a variety of instructional and assessment strategies were explored, there was little systematic effort made to incorporate many of them into the building-wide fabric of instruction, with the exception of some use of interdisciplinary units, early plans for the reading intervention program, some specialized reading strategies, and a general notion of "more hands-on activities." This increase in active-learning experiences was documented by almost 40% of the teachers and 75% of the 11 middle school students who were interviewed each of their four years at EMMS.

Difficult to determine is whether an increase in active-learning opportunities had any positive impact on student performance, although the EMMS students interviewed yearly reported that such activities helped them to learn more effectively. This difficulty had been anticipated since the earliest Venture Capital Steering Committee meetings, when two teachers in the group raised the question, "How will we know that it was the Venture Capital changes we made that made the difference?" Even at that time, the majority of the committee members viewed it to be "quite difficult, if not impossible," to tease out any one factor in teaching practice that made the difference in student performance. They finally agreed that perhaps the question of what change made the difference was not the question to ask, but rather, how is the total context — e.g., instruction, building, teachers, staff, climate, state mandates — changing what we see happening at EMMS and enabling students to be more successful?

Another benefit of the five-year focus on reflective change may be redefinition of the roles of teachers and principal. As teachers look ahead to the next phase of continuous-improvement planning, many have indicated that they "feel empowered to help the building chart its future course." Teachers have indicated that they will be more vocal and honest about barriers they face, as well as how they may be able to remove any barriers. They further believe that "the building will move more easily and more actively into continuous-improvement planning than they would have otherwise." And, regardless of continuous-improvement-planning mandates, they also believe that the building may actually move faster, now that the evaluation, paperwork, and pressure constraints of the grant have been removed! However, with the end of Venture Capital paperwork and pressures also comes the end of additional resources that have fueled staff development. Thus, the speed of progress on the journey of continuous improvement may change.

Questions for the Journey

EMMS faculty, administration, consultants, and evaluators have raised questions throughout both the Transforming Learning Communities case study and Venture Capital evaluation process that continue to highlight challenges that the building faces as it steps into the 21st century. Wrestling with these and similar questions may not only help EMMS to move into the new century with more confident strides but also help other schools facing similar issues. The following questions address the areas of support

and recognition for teacher innovation, resources for continuous school-based professional development, teacher control and responsibility for self-examination of school-improvement efforts, the tension between teacher autonomy and consensus for change, the role of the principal in continuous improvement, and the tension between raising scores on high-stakes proficiency tests and meeting the individual needs of all learners.

Several questions related to the provision of support for the change process were raised throughout the studies. The question "How can the 'pioneers' and 'early settlers' in the land of change be encouraged and rewarded for their attempts to bring about positive changes?" addresses the ongoing concerns felt by teachers that they may be viewed as showoffs, busybodies, or position climbers if they share their new knowledge, excitement, and enthusiasm. Both at the district and building levels, teachers who are innovative, reflective about their practice, and willing to share expertise with peers may benefit from validation and reinforcement. In order to continue the progress that has been made in developing norms of continuous staff development and collegial professional growth, the administration may need to expand its efforts to recognize and use the leadership of these teachers. In their discussion of the ways to build professional communities in schools, Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) indicated that

> *Teachers must feel they are honored for their expertise — within the school as well as within the district, the parent community and other significant groups. Respect, trust and a shared sense of loyalty build professional commitment and the cooperation required for collaboration and shared decision making. (p. 5)*

The rewards for the effort required for professional development may offset the stress of being in the forefront of change.

A second support question revolves around the provision of professional development. The immediate question is, "How do we identify and secure ways to continue to provide opportunities for professional development for teachers now that the Venture Capital money is no longer available?" Teachers continue to point to the value of exploring issues through Conversation Series seminars, attending professional conferences, visiting schools, and having the time to collaborate with each other if they are to keep abreast of current best practices in middle-level education. They increasingly see the need for opportunities to observe and collaborate with each other. Throughout the middle school literature, the development of strong professional communities where professional development is valued and supported is viewed as the best way to support teachers as they work to improve schools (Smylie & Hart, 1997).

Furthermore, there is much evidence of an emerging concept of staff development at EMMS as a long-term process that is teacher-driven, teacher-constructed, and teacher-evaluated, e.g., the continued use of the Conversation Series as a way to address current challenges and concerns. To build on this emerging norm of professional development, there is continued need for financial support and release time. To let money and time limitations halt the types of professional-development EMMS teachers have

found to be valuable would make a strong statement that teachers' professional-development needs are secondary to re-roofing the building or purchasing new buses.

Another set of questions focuses on data collection and interpretation. Two initial questions are, "What data are needed for faculty and staff to make decisions about 'What's best for kids'?" and "Who should collect and interpret the data?" As noted earlier, EMMS faculty endured endless scrutiny, analysis and questioning. Time and time again, they subjected themselves to time-consuming internal reflection and intensive external review.

Since such in-depth analysis began, the question has been raised regarding whether it would have been better for the reflective mirror to have been handed over much sooner to the people whose reflections appeared. Would teachers value data collection and data-based decision making more highly, and would they see its relevance to curricular and instructional issues more clearly, if some of their colleagues were prepared to collect and help them interpret the data, rather than relying on outside evaluators? If teachers chose the questions to ask and the types of data to collect, and if they learned to establish the criteria against which potential solutions were evaluated, would they be more likely to consider the findings as they discuss what's best for kids?

Additional questions revolve around the tension between building consensus and teacher autonomy. As discussed in previous chapters, much innovation has occurred as a result of individual teachers choosing to do things differently. And yet practices that they, and perhaps even a majority of the faculty, would recommend have not been adopted by the building as a whole, because individual teachers have been permitted to say, "It's not for me" or "I don't think that [the specific practice] will be better for kids so I won't do it." This tension is also reported in the literature. Firestone and Wilson (1989) discuss how "schools must balance the need for autonomy . . . with that for cohesiveness and integration" (as cited in Firestone & Louis, 1989, p. 47).

The Continuous Improvement Planning Committee may benefit from discussing such questions as, "Are there some changes that we will adopt as a faculty without full agreement?" and "How do we decide which, if any, recommendations should be adopted without building-wide consensus?" If teachers are serving as researchers as described above, they may find it easier to establish more specific criteria upon which to base their decisions, a perspective shared by Calhoun (1994), who describes the benefits of teachers serving as equal partners in school research rather than being the object of others' research. Clear criteria for decisions may make it easier to move toward consensus related to adopting a particular practice or approach.

A focus on continuous-improvement planning also returns both teachers and administrators to a reconsideration of the role of the principal. Is it enough to be the sand in the oyster, raising critical questions during the decision-making process, or does there need to be a point in time, after much input and reflection, when the principal makes the final decision and ensures that it is carried out? Is there a point

in time when, although consensus is not complete, it is recognized that the school has developed vision and mission statements, and therefore the direction for change has been established? If such is the case, then another question to be raised is whether the principal should just step in and say, "Here is where we are going. There are many ways to get there, but this is our goal."

There is no guarantee that such an approach would be more effective with EMMS and schools with a similar culture than the approach currently used. In a discussion of school leadership, Firestone and Louis (1997) point out that one type of transformational leadership is "facilitative leadership." Firestone and Louis note that this approach:

> *. . . emphasizes tactics such as team building, coordination and feedback, conflict resolution, articulation of visions, and provision of resources — as contrasted with decision making — as a means to foster a cohesive, change-oriented school culture.* (1997, p. 97)

They continue that "the management of tensions that keep the school in motion, e.g., keep the culture actively reflective," (p. 47) is actually the core of facilitative leadership.

Another set of questions can be raised around the tension between implementing practices and designing programs that meet the needs of middle-school-age children and adopting practices and programs that are supposed to raise proficiency scores. Although, as noted earlier, EMMS scores continue to be considerably above the state average, there has been a ceiling effect when looking at 1993-97 data. Questions related directly to improving proficiency passage rates include, "In what specific content areas do those who 'have marginal failure scores' have the greatest deficits?" and "Are there gaps in our curriculum that are consistent with the deficit areas?" This tension also has been noted in the school-culture literature. Louis and Miles (1990 as cited in Firestone and Louis, 1997) describe the "need to manage the relationship between the internal culture of the school, and an external environment that is often unpredictable, intrusive, and even hostile." With the increased pressure to reach the 75% passage rate, it is becoming more of a challenge to remember to use proficiency data as just one of the data sources for continuous-improvement planning and for making curricular and instructional decisions.

Additional questions can be raised regarding the tension between improving scores and meeting individual needs. One question is, "How can we align the curriculum to ensure that the curricular gaps are closed and that those deficit content and skills areas are more thoroughly and systematically addressed prior to proficiency testing?" Other questions relate to how the identified content and skills will be addressed. "Will you just add on discrete lessons or units, will you embed these concepts into existing curriculum plans, or will you revamp the entire curriculum to add focus to the deficit areas?" "Will you do a crash course immediately prior to the proficiency test on how to take the test, or will you embed test-taking procedures and practice into your daily instruction?"

Addressing further questions can perhaps lessen the tension between content taught and student needs. "Can the needed content and skills be integrated into units or lessons perceived by middle

school children as relevant to their lives, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will remember and use their learning far beyond answering questions on a proficiency test?" "Are there ways to configure instructional time and develop lessons that not only address the academic needs of middle school students (as currently defined by the proficiency tests), but also the social and emotional needs of 10- to 15-year-olds who sometimes spend their days on emotional roller coasters and at the edge of social precipices?" These questions and more will need to be raised and alternatives explored if the tension between high scores and student needs is not to become so great that it causes a number of existing effective approaches to snap!

Where Do We Go from Here?

As you open the double set of glass doors leading into EMMS, you enter a well-lit, inviting, open area in which student work is displayed on the walls. This area, known as the commons, is a multipurpose space used for lunch, study hall, and meetings. The announcement case in the commons contains the following quote: "Success is a Journey, Not a Destination." Such is the case with the change process at EMMS, as it is across the district. Conversations with teachers, parents, students and community members; observations of classes, meetings, and grade-level or building events; and reflections on the EMMS evolution story to date all point to the conclusion that EMMS is moving ahead toward meeting the goals of preparing students to meet the challenges of the new century. EMMS educators have used the processes of collaboration and inquiry for ongoing improvement and have wrestled with the challenges to integration that have been discovered. Building faculty and administration have made many strides on the continuous-improvement journey and recognize the need for strengthening and refining their use of collaboration, inquiry, and integration as they step into the new millennium.

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APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY

The development of this case study occurred in several stages. At the beginning of the study, the six-member team met to brainstorm various ways to approach the development of the case. Team members agreed that the approach would be somewhat different from that used in the 11 other schools, since they would use not only data collected for the case, but also data collected by Kaye Martin as a consultant for the building and by Linda Morrow as one of the district's Venture Capital evaluation-team members.

With the building team members' many years of experience at EMMS, the decision was made for Pat Bennett, John Smith, and Doug Winner to focus on developing a history of the school and to conduct member checks. Doug also agreed to serve as the key communication link among team members, as well as a resource to clarify and confirm data. Kaye's initial role was to write the story of her involvement as a consultant with the building. Linda's first task was to draft the story of her involvement with EMMS, primarily as a Venture Capital evaluator. Catherine Glascock agreed to conduct teacher, student, and administrator interviews and focus groups and to interview Kaye and Linda about issues related to the case study, as well as to spend time in the building observing and talking informally with other stakeholders. Dr. Stephen Anderson served as the link to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, as well as the overall project co-director.

All interviews and focus groups, both those conducted for this study and the earlier Venture Capital evaluation activities, were taped and transcribed. Data from these transcripts and other evaluation activities were coded and organized in terms of the relationship to themes identified within the Transforming Learning Communities research project. Team members developed their own components of the case and then shared them with all other members. All drafts of the case study were distributed to all members, who provided oral and written feedback. Linda and Kaye used feedback from all members in the development of the final draft.

TRANSFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES SITES

EAST MUSKINGUM MIDDLE SCHOOL

East Muskingum Local Schools (Muskingum County)
Muskingum College
Ohio University

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

1 **Brentmoor Elementary School**
Mentor Exempted Village Schools
Cleveland State University

2 **Cranwood Learning Academy**
Cleveland City Schools
Cleveland State University

3 **Dawson-Bryant Elementary School**
Dawson-Bryant Local Schools
(Lawrence County)
Ohio University

4 **Lomond Elementary School**
Shaker Heights City Schools
Cleveland State University

5 **Miami East North Elementary School**
Miami East Local Schools
(Miami County)
Miami University

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

6 **East Muskingum Middle School**
East Muskingum Local Schools
(Muskingum County)
Muskingum College
Ohio University

7 **Galion Middle School**
Galion City Schools
The Ohio State University

8 **Talawanda Middle School**
Talawanda City Schools
Miami University

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

9 **Federal Hocking High School**
Federal Hocking Local Schools
(Athens County)
Ohio University

10 **Franklin Heights High School**
South-Western City Schools
The Ohio State University

11 **Reynoldsburg High School**
Reynoldsburg City Schools
The Ohio State University

12 **Robert A. Taft High School**
Cincinnati City Schools
Miami University

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